REBEL MOON

WURM: EX MATERIA:
HEROES & MONSTERS

PETER APERLO

TITAN
BOOKS

A ZACK SNYDER FILM

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WRITTEN BY PETER APERLO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY CLAY ENOS, CHRIS STROTHER AND JUSTIN LUBIN

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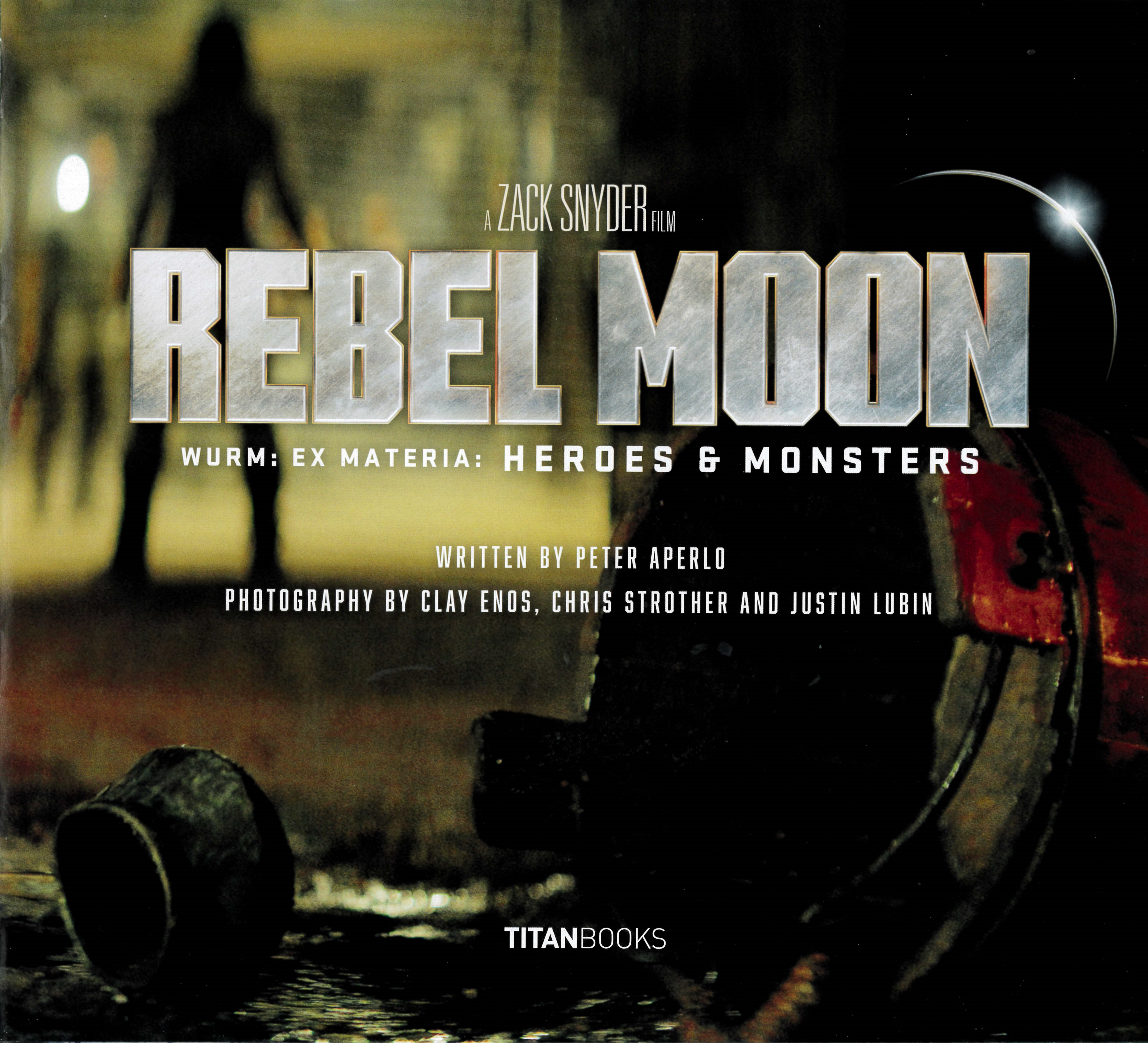

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HEROES & MONSTERS
FOREWORD

"WHILE THERE IS LIFE, THERE IS HOPE, AND ONLY THE DEAD HAVE NONE."—THEOCRITUS

Tragedy and trauma are part and parcel of the human condition. It has been this way since earliest times, wherever there have been people, even—we can imagine—on planets orbiting unknown stars in some distant galaxy. Whether that tragedy is the loss of a loved one, something done to us, something we did, or perhaps failed to do, the resulting trauma is an insidious force that can leave us rooted in place. And it makes no difference if this inertia arises from being faced with seemingly overwhelming odds from without or crippling self-doubt from within. It's a muddy mire where wheels spin uselessly, frustrating any chance at forward progress.

But just as ancient is this simple truth: While there is life, there is hope. The Greek poet Theocritus knew this (but he was probably not the first), and it has been echoed down through the ages by the Roman statesman Cicero, the New Testament, and even cosmologist Stephen Hawking. Where there's life, there is hope. Realizing this and reclaiming hope is key. It's the grit you throw under your wheels to get going again. *Rebel Moon*, then, is for those who have that grit, but especially for those who have yet to find it.

◀ Sofia Boutella as Kora.

▲ Jimmy searches for answers in the wilds of Veldt.

HEROES & MONSTERS

INTRODUCTION

REBEL MOON has been a long time coming. As concepts, notes, and sketches, Zack Snyder has been developing the story, characters, and worlds that would become this sprawling space opera for about two decades now. During that time he has also been steadily adding to his resume as a feature filmmaker, seemingly in preparation for this monumental undertaking. First, he was a director (*Dawn of the Dead*, 2004), then a writer-director (*300*, 2006), next a writer-director-producer (*Sucker Punch*, 2011), and most recently, a writer-director-producer-cinematographer (*Army of the Dead*, 2021). With that last credit we can also throw in "creator of an original cinematic universe," which the galaxy-spanning *Rebel Moon* is as well, only on a mind-blowingly larger scale.

"This truly is next level," says Zack's wife and producing partner Deborah Snyder. "We've had a lot of big movies that we built big sets for, but when you're world creating, creating places that no one has seen, there's an extra excitement about it. On the scale of what we are doing here, we're going to so many different planets, it is definitely the biggest thing that I've ever worked on."

◀ Coller and the Snyders pose with their full-scale dropship.

▶ Snyder seems oddly at ease with the monstrous Harmada, played by Jena Malone.

THE STONE QUARRY FILM
GRAND ELECTRIC

Snyder makes it clear that the *Rebel Moon* films sit squarely in the realm of science-fantasy, as opposed to hard science-fiction. That means not being obsessed with the feasibility of the science and technology on display, not simply to avoid the minutiae, but primarily to be able to tell exactly the tale he wished to tell. For example, "The guns are line of sight, so when you have two ships fighting in space, this one has to shoot, and you see this other one," he explains. "But you can imagine that in the future, in real science fiction, you don't need to see the enemy to fight them. Conflict becomes really abstracted by the science itself. So we're literally superimposing a lot of the iconography of the conflict in an organic way so that we can tell the story. Conflicts are really straightforward—they can be surrounded by myth and magic and all that, but in the end the question is: Do you have the heart to do this thing? That's what this movie is."

Struggling to find that heart is lead heroine Kora, played by Sofia Boutella. "The story's complicated psychologically, and it also has a lot of elements, a lot of names and places we've never heard of," she says. "But at the same time, it's very similar and parallel to a lot of what's going on in the world. Zack is giving us something that's very entertaining, but this story is very valuable and really intense, and these characters, to me, exist. It's not just entertainment, it's saying something far more profound, and you cannot pretend that. You have to go there."

▲ (left to right) Producers Deborah Snyder, Wesley Coller, and Zack Snyder.

▶ Snyder gives Dustin Ceithamer as Jimmy some pointers on the use of the staff.

In addition to the invaluable support provided by Netflix, Snyder looked to producer Eric Newman, who he had not worked with since *Dawn of the Dead*. For Newman, it was a no-brainer to re-team with Snyder. "You don't often get all-in-one in terms of someone's ability to harness an aesthetic, to create and maintain some really beautiful imagery," Newman says. "On top of that, he has a technological expertise. He has an understanding of not just what he wants to make and film and see, but how to make and film and see it, so that we can see that. He also has a narrative ability as a storyteller that not every filmmaker has. And he's truly a fan of films and television. You can go a long way having two out of four of those things, but Zack has mastery of all four. An added bonus, for those of us who get to work with him, is he's a great guy. He's egoless in a world where that's increasingly rare."

A big part of realizing the vision Snyder had for the films was relying heavily on practical sets and props—real-life places and things for the actors to physically interact with—be it a rough frontier bar or a Motherworld dropship. Other inter-planetary vistas that were too large or too fantastic to build made use of digital visual effects (VFX), but the cast had faith in what would be made of those enormous green screens they were staring at. "We arrive at a planet called Pollux, and the director tells us, 'Over there is the coliseum where you'll find General Titus,'" recalls Michiel Huisman, who plays Gunnar. "You always have to have a little bit of trust, but knowing Zack Snyder's work, I know that it's going to look insane. It's going to look amazing, and probably even better than I would imagine it will look. I'm looking forward to seeing that."

The heroes themselves had to look amazing, too, in terms of being physically capable—and VFX enhancement was not an option. For this, Snyder put the cast in the hands of weightlifter, bodybuilder, and fitness trainer Alessandro Komadina. "He wants us to look like Olympians, but there's no point in us being functional Olympians. We're not here to do that," explains Staz Nair, who plays the mainly shirtless Tarak. "I've trained for longer and got less results. Diet is a massive, massive component to it."

▲ Bukowski appears to be absolutely delighted at the sight of Noble's mangled body.

► Snyder shoots Nathan Albright as a Motherworld military officer.

▲ The camera department in Veldt: (left to right) Eric Guerin, Becky Cantor, Victoria Betancourt, Chris Sloan, David Haeussler, Eli Snyder, John Clothier, Karla Mendoza Moyar, Mike Prior, Joshua Gollish, George Santo Pietro, Zack Snyder, Jason Hibarger, Braden Batsford, Jac Fitzgerald, Blake Collins, Kevin Miles.

◀ Zack celebrates a battlefield win with the villagers of Veldt.

▲ (left to right) First assistant director/co-producer Misha Bukowski, vice president of Original Studio Film at Netflix Ori Marmur, and director/producer/cinematographer/writer Zack Snyder on set.

The workouts also served as a way for the cast to bond as a team, but that didn't come without some good old-fashioned competition. "At some point I came up with a really brilliant idea—this dumb idea—to do a little pushup challenge," recalls Huisman. "It's called the 'Bring Sally Up' challenge. It's only thirty pushups in three minutes. It's the hardest thirty pushups you've ever done in your life, because it's very slow. I don't think I quite made it to the end; that was a pity, because it was my idea. Only Staz did." Others found that moderation suited them better. "The very first day I was shooting, I got really distracted. I couldn't focus on acting. I had a piece of chocolate, because I was so angry at myself, and after a piece of chocolate, I was focusing on my job well," admits Doona Bae, who plays Nemesis. "I've been having chocolates secretly for acting."

Like any good leader, Snyder would never ask anyone to do anything he wouldn't do himself. "Zack is on the same diet as he puts the rest of the cast on, and he works out as hard as they do—although he's carrying a camera on his shoulder most of the day, so I think his diet needs to improve," laughs Deborah Snyder.

But diet or no, the man wearing many hats on this production never lets up, even working in the car to and from a full shooting day. "Being the director and the DP [director of photography], he's always in the midst of it. There's never a down moment. But when it's something you really, truly love doing, you don't mind it," Deborah Snyder says. "I think we're super lucky that Zack and I get to do this together. And our son, Eli, is now with us, and he's directing second unit. So, it really is a family affair. Not to mention that a lot of our crew are our family, and I do feel that sense of community, which ties in thematically to what we're doing here. Veldt is about community. It's about why we fight."

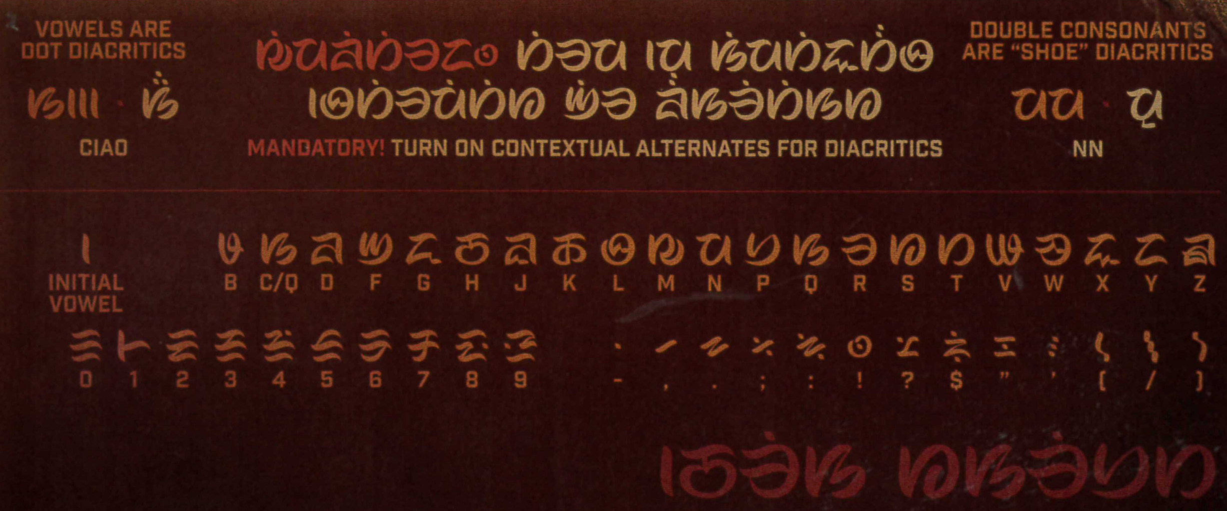
HEROES

HEROES

KORA / ARTHELAIS

KORA IS NO STRANGER to tragedies and bloodshed; some have been inflicted upon her, but she has been responsible for many others. "Kora is one of these children that has been stolen from her world and from her family and has been raised by Balisarius, who taught her to be a killing machine, basically," explains Sofia Boutella, who portrays the enigmatic heroine at the center of *Rebel Moon*. "She became a key soldier in the Motherworld military, the personal guard of Princess Issa. She learned to love her adopted father and he ended up betraying her. That was too much for her, and she decided to escape." Balisarius' betrayal results in the death of the Royal Family—Arthelais (Kora's *nom de guerre* in the Realm) being wholly blamed for that act of treason—and her becoming a hunted fugitive. Hiding on the remote world of Veldt for years, she is forced to confront her past when Noble and the Motherworld dreadnought, *The King's Gaze*, unexpectedly arrive, seeking food. "I think I have found a place where they would never go, and here they are," Boutella says.

AHRIQ SCRIPT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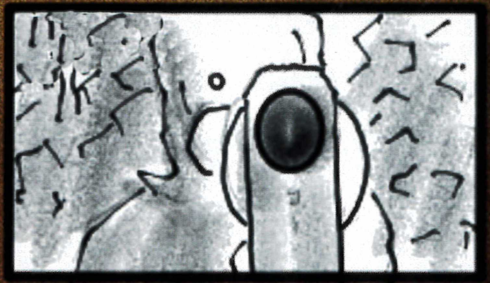
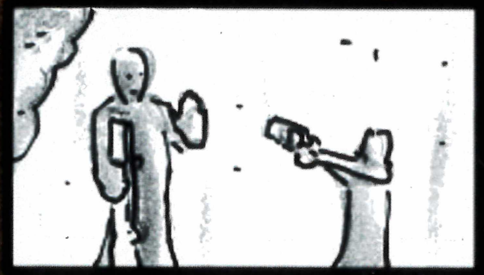
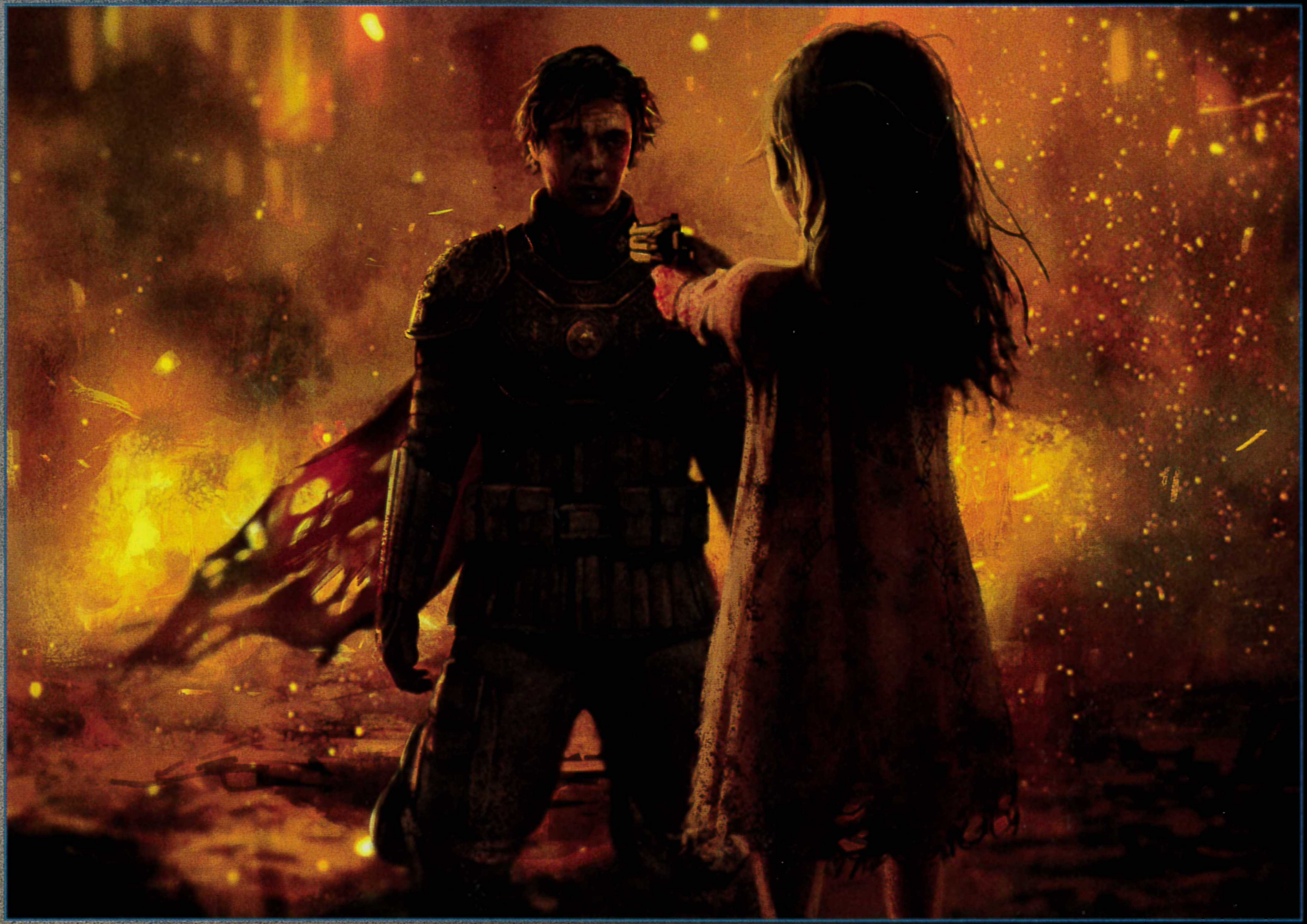
▲▲ Filming Jimmy in a Veldt wheat field.

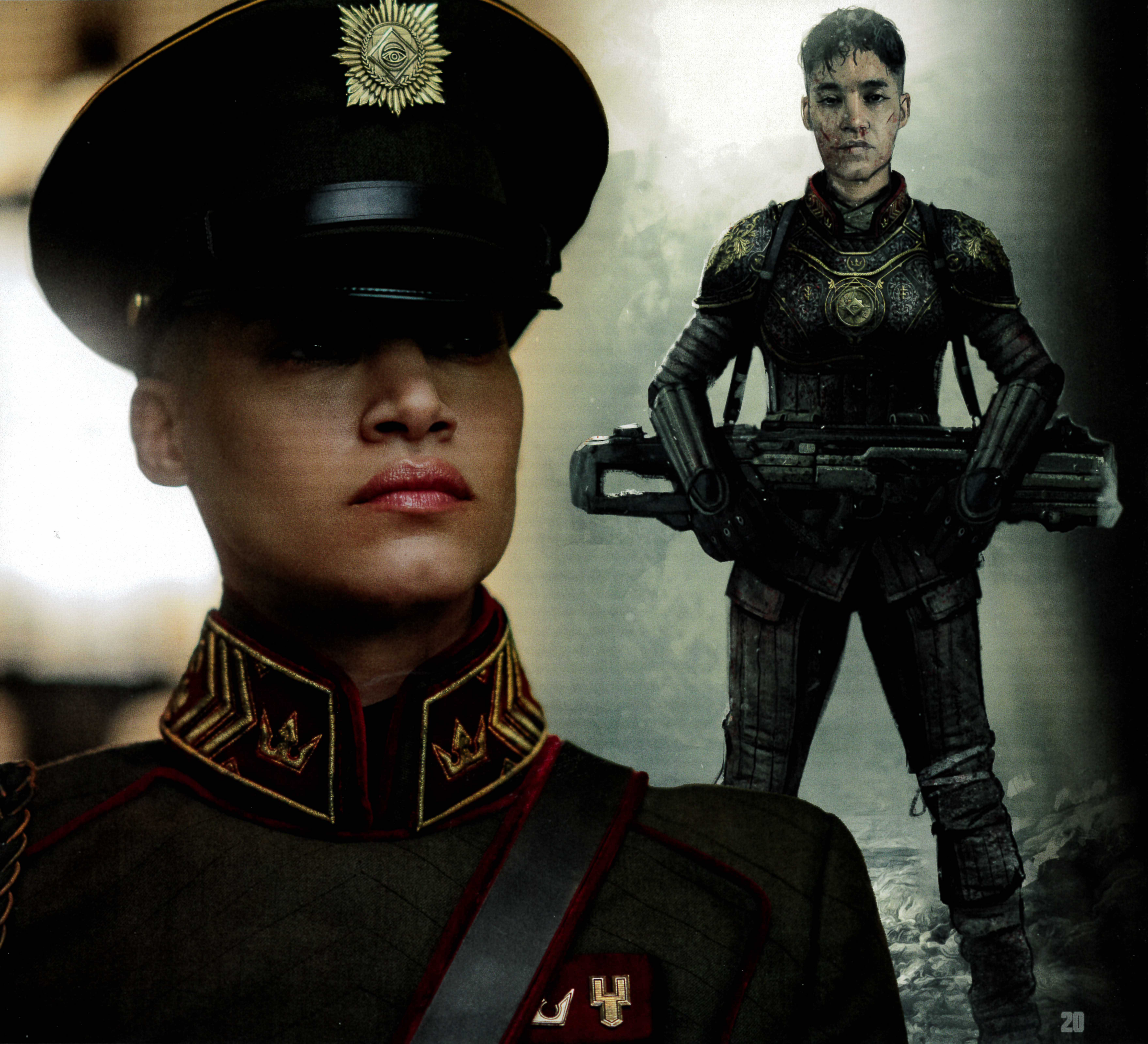
▼ All the storyboards found in this book were hand drawn by Zack Snyder.







◄▲▼ Balisarius (Fra Fee) spirits Young Kora (Elizabeth Martinez) away from her devastated home world.



◄▲► Kora (aka Arthelais) during her time in service to the Motherworld.

Playing such a morally complicated character, upon which an enormous project and possible franchise depended, was a daunting task for Boutella—who up until that point had never been a lead in a film. "I had no idea that it was going to be so expansive. I had no idea it was going to be two films back-to-back. I was excited, very nervous, and also humbled by all of that," Boutella says. "My nervousness is not a negative aspect; it's not a nervousness that makes me want to crawl back in a hole and hide. My nervousness is only a testimony that I care, and a testimony that it matters to me. It makes me actually want to go towards it. I'm forty years old and a woman in this industry. I'm deeply grateful that Zack really took me and gave me that chance, and for him to have believed in me."

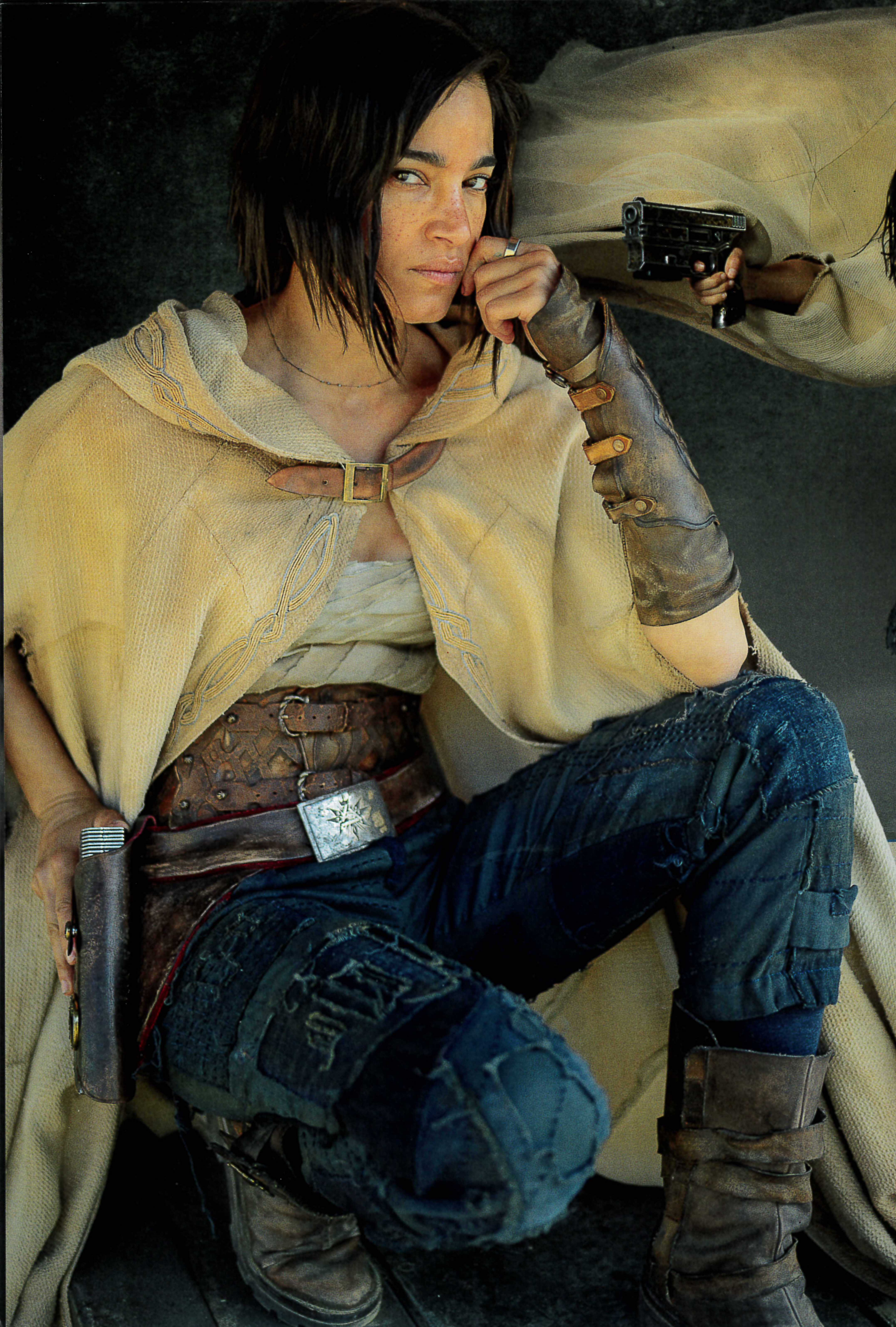
The first step to embodying Kora was coming to terms with the fact that she betrayed the girl she was supposed to defend with her life. "There were a few elements in the story that I thought I didn't know how to access, because I've never lived them, including the relationship with Issa. That's the one that was the hardest, the toughest for me. It's really intense and it's really dark. I could not forgive the act," Boutella says. "When you meet Kora, she's at a place where she's escaped what has tortured her. She is, from my perspective, in denial. She's not revealing who she truly is. When her past catches up with her, she has no choice. Instead of escaping, like she's been doing for a long time, she's in search of redemption and forgiveness, not revenge." She tries

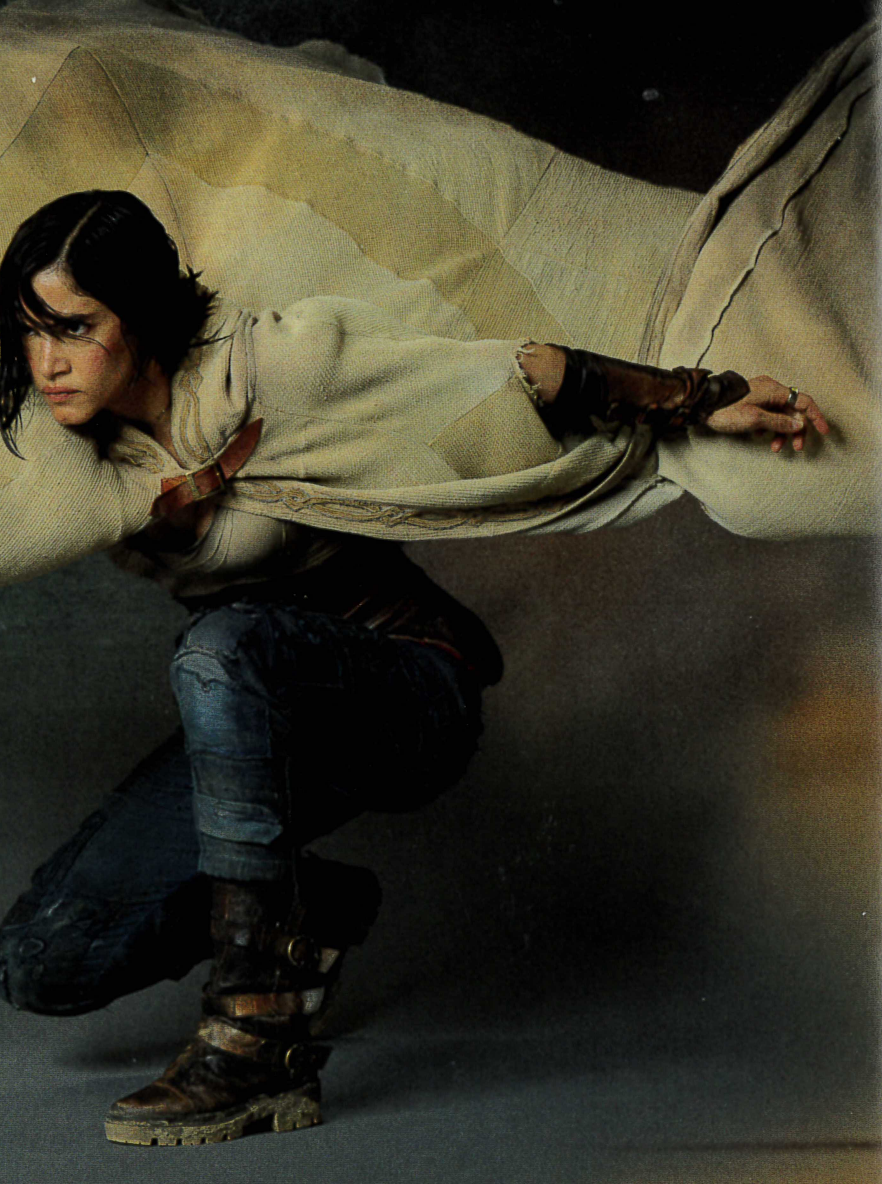
to do that by assembling a team to defend the innocents of Veldt from the cruel Motherworld she knows so well. "The villagers—everybody on Veldt—she sees in every single one of them what she has missed, and failed to do with Issa," she adds.

If Boutella has any regrets, it's that Kora never gets the chance to find closure by confronting Balisarius, at least in these two films. "The first time she sees *The King's Gaze* over Veldt, I think the first person that comes to her mind is Balisarius, and she never sees him in the [present] day," Boutella says. "It's living here in my throat, without ever being spoken about, but when I fight Noble, when I see the Motherworld, all of that represents Balisarius to me, who is my father who raised me. That love is still in you, even if it's muddled by shame and resentment, and also guilt. I feel so invested in Kora and a part of me is like, 'I want this to happen: the encounter, the face off.' But wherever that goes, I know Zack has many, many other inspiring ideas that he's going to grace us with. I just want to see this unfold. I'm still discovering her."

Although a veteran of action roles in films such as *Kingsman: The Secret Service* (2015),

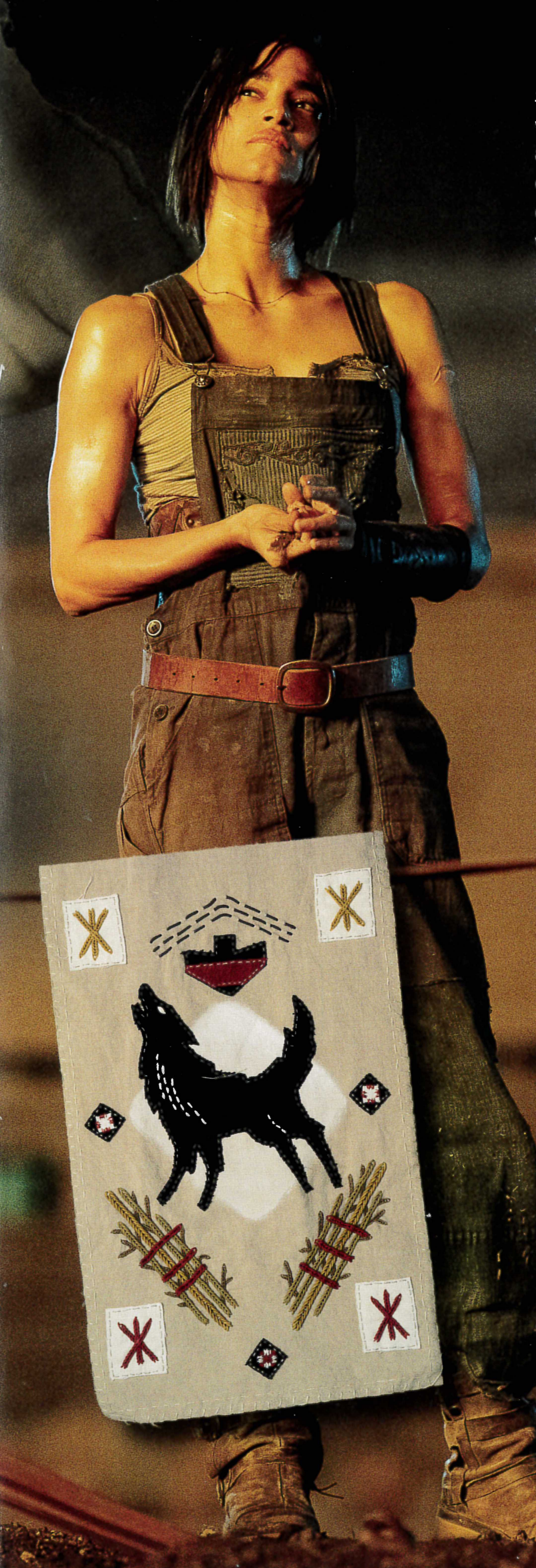
◀▲▶▼ Freshly shorn Kora defends Veldt with everything she has.





◀▲▼ Kora in her traveling ensemble.

▶ Kora's wolf banner.

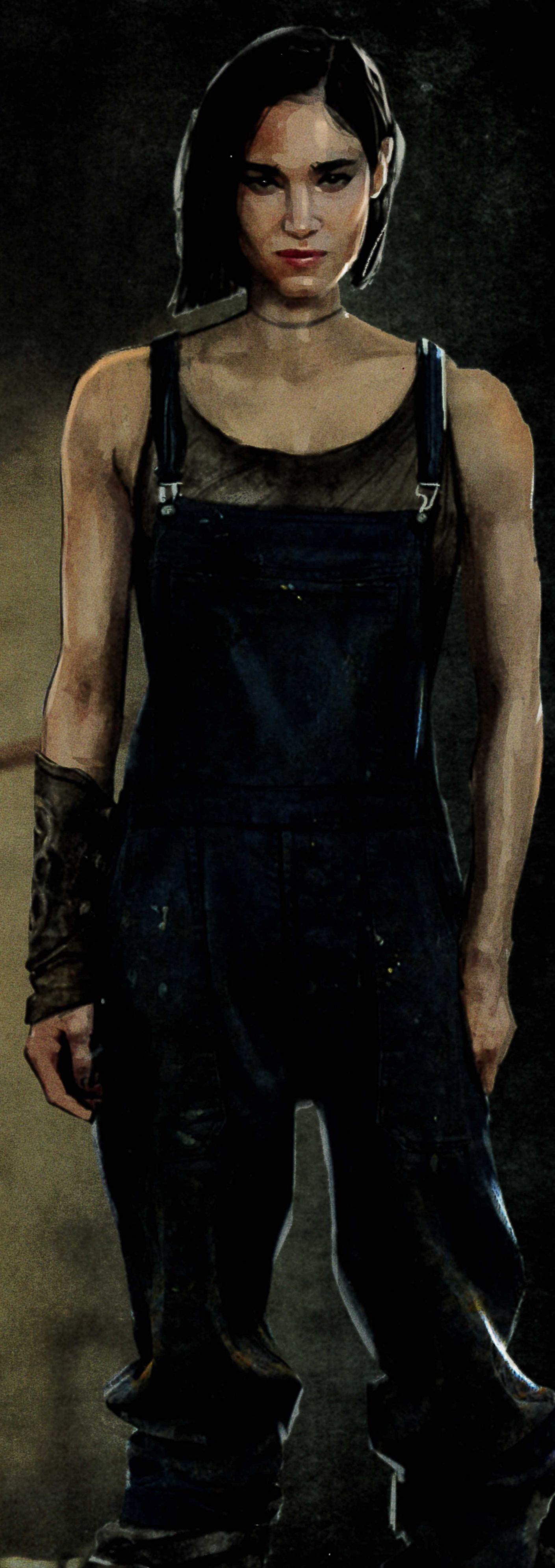


Star Trek: Beyond (2016), and *The Mummy* (2017), Boutella's first passion was dance. A native of Algeria, she began classical dance instruction at the age of five. After her family fled to France to escape the Algerian civil war when she was ten, she broadened her dancing horizons and eventually joined the French national team in rhythmic gymnastics when she was eighteen. Backed by an amazing stunt team headed by Freddy Bouciegues, she also credits her early movement training with enhancing those grueling action sequences she performed herself. "I owe it to dancing and the discipline of dancing," Boutella explains. "With movement, I'm very particular; I'm picky in order to better the movement and what works better for camera. You can only see that by watching playback. When we danced, they always showed us what we were doing, and having an eye for that and cleaning [up]. I've spent most of my life cleaning choreography, cleaning numbers, cleaning the body and the shape, and the way it looks."

Similar exactitude went into assembling her wardrobe. "Kora is a superhero. We want her to look strong and iconic, and also beautiful," costume designer Stephanie Portnoy Porter explains. "Especially with Sofia, who moves so beautifully, it was important to me to have something as part of her costume that would enhance that movement, which is where the cloak came in." Add to this a leather waist cincher inspired by Comanche horse culture (for lower back support), and a pair of trousers in Japanese patchwork *boro* style, and Kora is ready for farm work, overland travel, or close combat.

"Sofia is a force [of nature]," says Stuart Martin, who plays village charmer Den. "You're constantly transfixed by that, and the rawness and the emotion that is bubbling under the surface. I don't think you often get to see that in a lead in a big film, playing a superhero. There's no worry about how it looks, or any ego of the actor in Sofia when she's performing, and that is incredibly exciting to watch. I think people are really going to be blown away by her performance in this. Such strength, and then the vulnerability and rawness."

When Sam distributes her banners to the heroes before the climactic battle, Kora is directly associated with the image of the wolf—an animal rich with mythological significance in the iconography of the Motherworld. "There's a lot of wolf symbolism that the Realm has taken on, but Kora, our main character, is our wolf," Deborah Snyder says. "She is a protector, and she's fierce, and she's loyal—all these attributes. She's the leader of the pack. She's the Alpha."



◆ Concept for Kora's farming attire, and the finished look.

THEMES

SECOND CHANCES

THERE'S HARDLY A PERSON ON KORA'S RAG-TAG CREW

who doesn't regret something. It might be something they did, or something they didn't do, but that regret has come to dominate their lives. It is slowly consuming them. Titus drinks to dull the remorse he feels for the loss of all the lives of those who followed him into rebellion—or maybe he simply feels guilty that he escaped the Motherworld's wrath. Tarak fled his home world rather than stay and fight. Nemesis fights for revenge with a single-minded obsession, all the while knowing it can never bring back her family or her culture. Kora, who as a royal bodyguard once carried a gun engraved with the motto "My Life For Hers," can never forget how badly she betrayed that oath. Like moons tidally locked in orbit around a malevolent planet, they can neither leave the path they are on, nor can they even see that there is another path. Second chances seemingly don't apply to them.

However, that hopeless worldview begins to transform at that pivotal juncture when Kora comes to Sam's aid in the granary. "You meet her and she is in that space of denial,

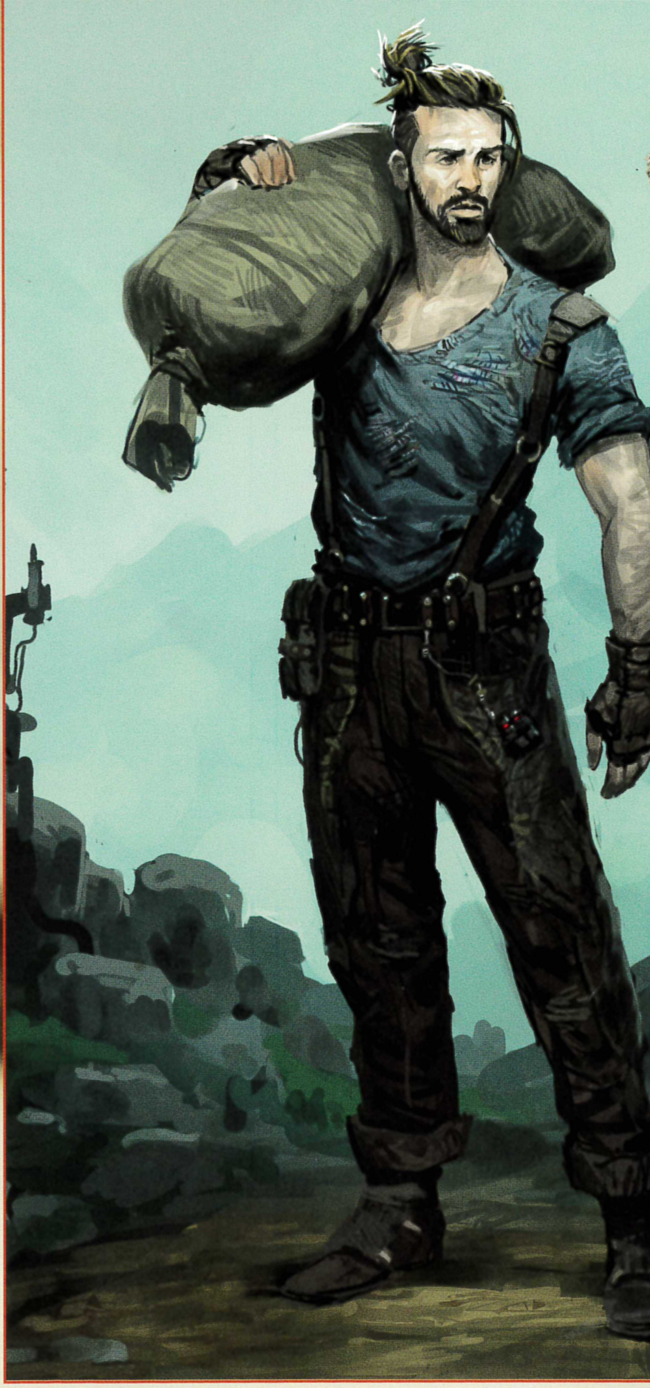
of shoving down everything she's gone through. For the longest time, Kora has been hiding where she's from, has been hiding the fact that she was a soldier," Sofia Boutella explains. "It stemmed from the fact that they're hurting Sam, and that she couldn't let that go—Kora had made this decision to actively go and show her true nature. That's a very crucial moment also, because that's when she decides that we are going to fight. Before that, in the longhouse, she was telling everybody, 'You need to flee. You need to escape. You cannot fight these people. They will always win.' She comes from a place of being traumatized, and she knows what she's talking about. Then, throughout the story, she regains that power, that confidence, that at one time was placed in the wrong hands and for the wrong reasons. She looks for redemption." Kora's newfound belief that the Motherworld can be challenged and defeated becomes a beacon of hope for her recruits and for the people of Veldt.

▼ (left to right) Sam (Charlotte Maggi), Milius (E. Duffy), Aris (Sky Yang), Tarak (Staz Nair), Kora, Titus (Djimon Hounsou), Gunnar (Michiel Huisman), Hagen (Ingvar Sigurdsson), Nemesis (Doona Bae), and Den (Stuart Martin).

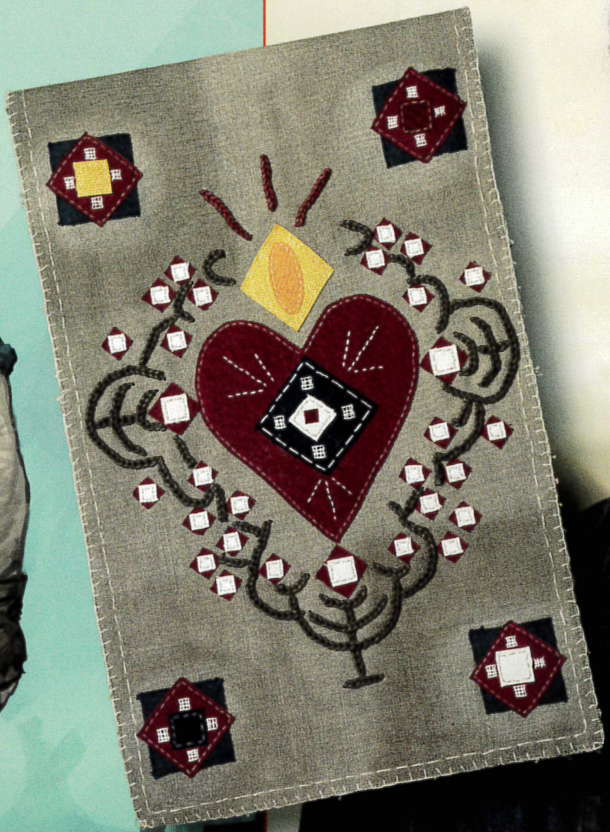
GUNNAR

ANOTHER CHARACTER with a past to atone for is Gunnar. First, his sale of wheat to the Bloodaxe insurgents draws the eye of the Motherworld. Then, when Admiral Noble sees Gunnar as being more willing to sell grain than Sindri is, it swiftly spells death for the village elder and his wife. "Gunnar makes a mistake in believing that there's a deal to be struck with this evil force coming in. I think a lot of the film for Gunnar is about redemption, and trying to make up for that mistake and help his people," explains Michiel Huisman (*Treme*, *Game of Thrones*), who plays this humble farmer who finds himself on an epic journey across the stars with Kora, searching for warriors to defend their tiny village.

▲▶ Gunnar with Kora in Veldt.



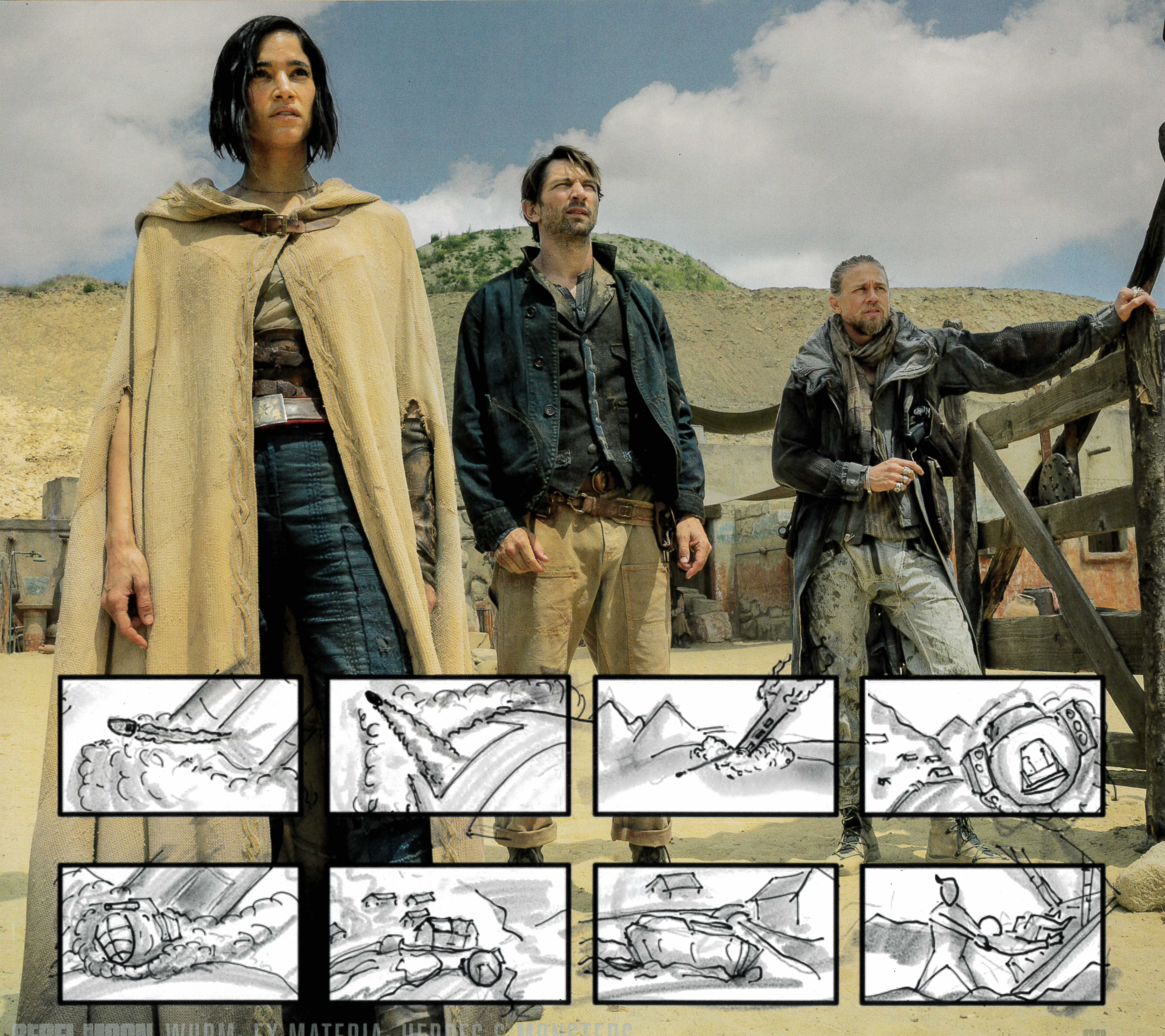
◀◀◀ Concept for Gunnar's wardrobe.

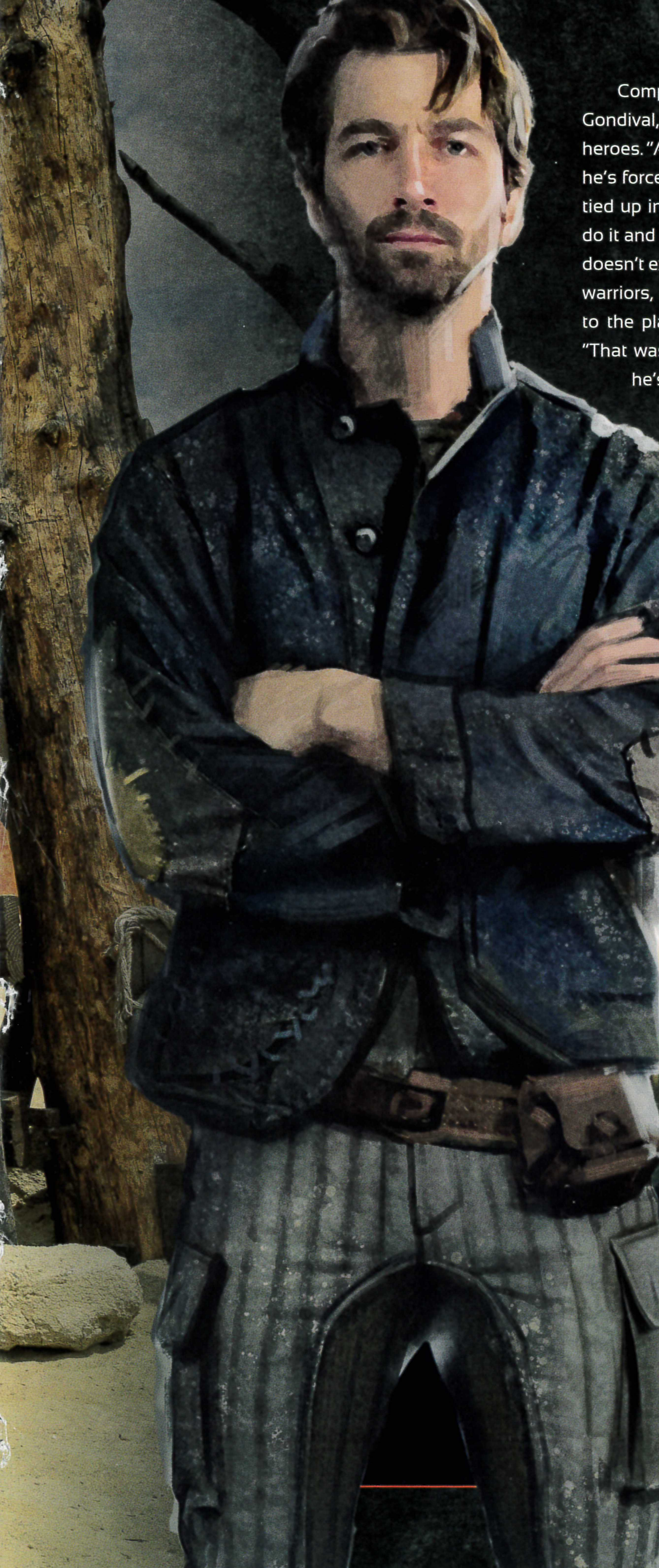


◀◀ Gunnar's embroidered heart banner from Sam.

The road Gunnar travels to seek his redemption, and how it alters him, was a big draw to the role for the Dutch actor. "He leads a peaceful life and he cares about his community. He's not quite a leader. He's not particularly brave. He's even a bit naive, I would say. One of the reasons why this character was so fun for me to play is that he really starts to change over the course of the story. He goes from shying away to standing up for himself. He slowly starts to find his strength, and eventually becomes somewhat of a hero," Huisman says.

Gunnar's growth is particularly stark if we juxtapose his behavior at the beginning of the journey with that at the end. In Providence, for example, he requires Kora's intervention when Dash Thif takes a liking to him; Gunnar, in fact, is too scared to help her out when it escalates into a shootout with the rest of the gang. "I thought it was surreal and funny in the way that she steps up for me. That was a fun scene to shoot," Huisman recalls.





Compare that to the consequences of Kai's betrayal on Gondival, where Gunnar must risk it all to save the entire band of heroes. "An important scene in Gunnar's arc is the moment when he's forced to pull the trigger on his own gang, when they're all tied up in these exoskeleton machines, and he decides not to do it and turns around and basically starts the fight. The enemy doesn't expect anything from him. Their focus is on the stronger warriors, and then when they least expect it, Gunnar steps up to the plate, which is what I love about him," Huisman says. "That was a crucial moment. From that moment on, I feel like he's off and he's going to do everything he has to do to protect his people." That desire to protect includes later touching off the Battle of Veldt, even when Kora's own determination wavers.

In many ways, the evolution of Gunnar's relationship with Kora mirrors the growth of his own courage and confidence. "I think he's had a crush on her from the moment she stepped on Veldt, but I don't think he ever had the guts to act on that. He likes her a lot, and she's different from the women Gunnar has been around up until that point, but she's also a force, and Gunnar finds her very scary," Huisman explains. "It's because of everything that happens to Gunnar and the changes that are happening to him—how he goes from a bit naive to standing up for himself—that he's finally able to express his love to Kora." Huisman, however, is quick to reiterate that Gunnar's motivations for undertaking that cross-galactic odyssey are pure. "He's so crushed by [Sindri's death], that he doesn't go on that journey with Kora just because it's a great opportunity to spend time with her. I don't think he believes initially that anything's ever going to happen between the two of them. But at some point, it seems like he can have both: help his people and maybe have the girl," he says. Of course, one of the great tragedies of *Rebel Moon* is that Gunnar makes the ultimate sacrifice to save both.

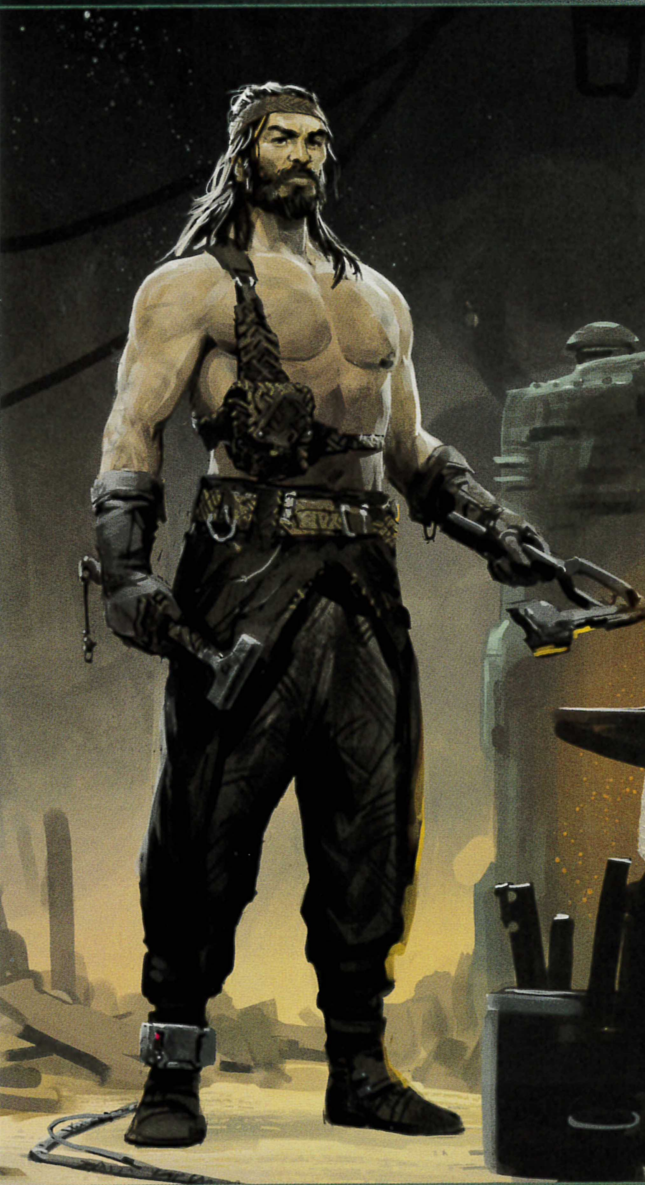
◀◀ Gunnar, Kai (Charlie Hunnam), and Kora at Hickman's ranch on Neu-Wodi.

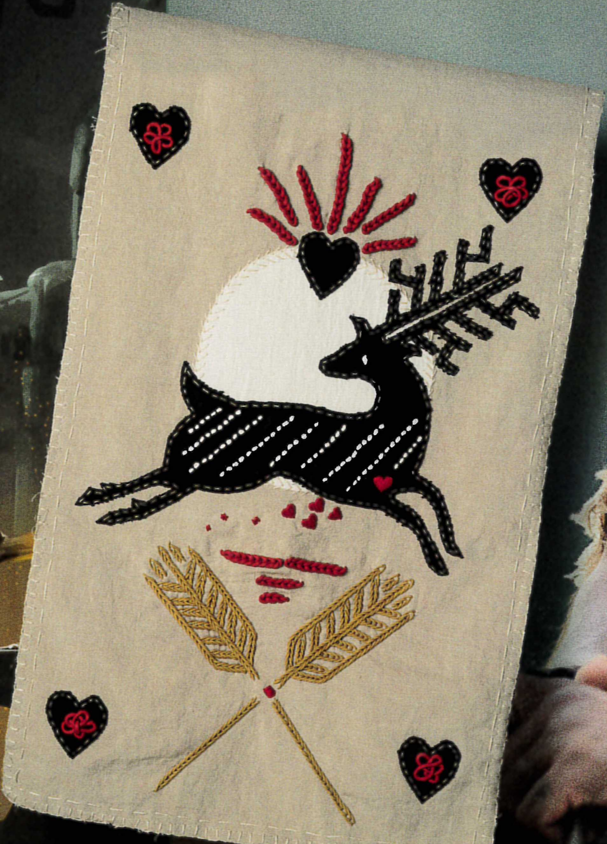
▼ Dash Thif (Dominic Burgess) makes Gunnar a not-so-tempting offer.

HEROES

TARAK DECIMUS

WHEN WE FIRST MEET TARAK, he's chained to an anvil and working as a blacksmith indentured to Hickman on the arid planet of Neu-Wodi. These humble circumstances belie his lofty origins as a prince of Samandrai, while at the same time telling us a good deal about his character. "He's there under a ball and chain and repaying a debt, but what we get to see is his code of conduct. He can break that chain at any point," explains Staz Nair (*Game of Thrones*, *Supergirl*) about the character he plays. So, one might ask, why doesn't Tarak just leave? "He's at a point of loss. He carries a lot of shame and guilt for not being able to protect those he loves. He had to





◄◄◄ Costume concept for Tarak.

◄◄ Tarak's wounded stag banner.

◄ Tarak on the move.

▲◀ Tarak working the forge for Hickman, and earning his freedom by taming the bennu.

watch something no one should ever have to watch: He watched his mom take her own life out of honor to protect the secrets of the land. That's a big loss at a young age, and he hasn't found his way back. He hasn't found his purpose," Nair says.

For his audition, Nair read the scene where Tarak must tame the ferocious, bird-like bennu, which told the actor so much about the character and where he was headed. "What I recognized from that scene was that him talking to the bennu was him talking to himself," Nair explains. "He's talking about shedding the shackles, and this is the first step—the first step he takes into re-becoming." Obviously, Nair nailed it, and he recalls his reaction on booking the role: "I remember letting out this kind of camp Viking scream. It was as powerful as it was emotional."

Certainly, the chance Kora brings this "feral prince"—as Nair refers to his character—allows him to fight back against the Motherworld that destroyed his home, but his purpose for doing so evolves over the course of the two films. "I think at first he joined to try and re-find his personal, selfish nobility, in the sense of, 'I couldn't fight then. Now I can fight,' but I think with the collective struggle and the natural process of us coming together, that gives

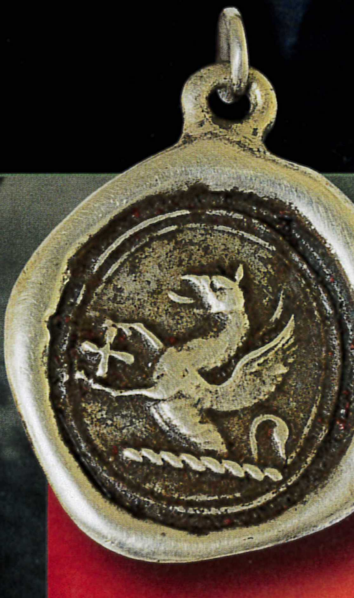
▲▼ Tarak "tames" the bennu.

▶ Tarak on the battlefield with Milius.

him something more for fight for. He gets an opportunity to reignite what he stands for, and takes the chance and joins this bunch of wonderful misfits to hopefully tackle that and re-find that within himself. It emboldens him and inspires him to catalyze that feeling and become that warrior, that prince again," Nair says.

Part of Tarak's growth as a character comes across in his style of fighting, which Nair accomplished while doing over ninety percent of his own stunts. "Tarak's very hands-on. He's an emotional man. He's visceral. So, I got to use a hammer and an axe, and it's very cool," Nair relates. "There's a high element of barbarism with him, but I hope it comes across as he finds himself. As he steps away from the feral prince and becomes the man he wished he could have been back then, I wanted the process of fighting to evolve and become—as brutal as it is—also meticulous and methodic. There is a confidence and a certainty to him. It was nice to personify his arc through the stunts."

Tarak fights Motherworld troops during the Battle of Veldt.



▲▼ Tarak and his mother (Soma Mitra) at the King's funeral on Samandrai.

A British actor with ancestors from Russia and the Indian state of Kerala, Nair is delighted Snyder took the interest to inject cultural and personal references from the performers into the many worlds of *Rebel Moon*. "I have had dreads in my hair, and a lot of people don't know, but the Indian people, along with people from Africa, we started the dreads," he explains. "And I have a necklace that I always wear that my fiancée gave me when I booked this job, and that's now the crest for my people in this movie—and what a wonderful thing." That personalized approach extended to the fictitious language, Samandrait, he speaks during his pivotal scene with the bennu. "I'm Russian-Indian, and my fiancée's Portuguese, and I've been learning Portuguese, so we mixed it with Russian and Portuguese, because I thought it would be nice to honor that. We even put our future kids' names in the language. I know, hopeless romantic," he admits.

HEROES

NEMESIS

THE FACT THAT THE CHARACTER lost everything when the forces of the Motherworld razed her homeworld, Byeol, was not a new story, but her response to the trauma was. She didn't run. She didn't hide. She didn't give up on herself. She went after her hated enemies with a literal vengeance. Crucial to her goal of taking on the Motherworld was her mastery of her ancestral oracle steel blades, recovered from the ruins of her village. But this mastery came at a terrible cost she inflicted on herself. "Her arms have been removed at the elbow, and from here down she has a prosthetic that powers these blades, to heat them up so that they reach their highest potential," explains Snyder. That potential has allowed her to cut down sixteen high-ranking officers of the Realm—which subsequently placed a hefty bounty on her head and earned her a new name: Nemesis.

▲ Snyder points out an image on his phone to Doona Bae.

▶ Nemesis's thunderbolt banner; she embarks on the path of vengeance.

Nemesis wields her ancestral oracle steel blades.

Doona Bae, who portrays the dogged swordswoman, is no stranger to sci-fi and genre fare, having acted in projects from *Cloud Atlas* to *Kingdom*. Still, it was a bit daunting to absorb an entire galaxy's worth of original lore. "When I read the script, there were so many words I didn't know, so many names, so many species. It's so creative," she says. "So, I thought, 'This is amazing.' It's a cool character, and she looks really strong. She's very charismatic, and quite cold. A woman of few words. You can hardly read her emotions from the outside. But I think she has a really warm heart in that cold shell."

▲ Nemesis trains the farmers of Veldt and helps out with the harvest.

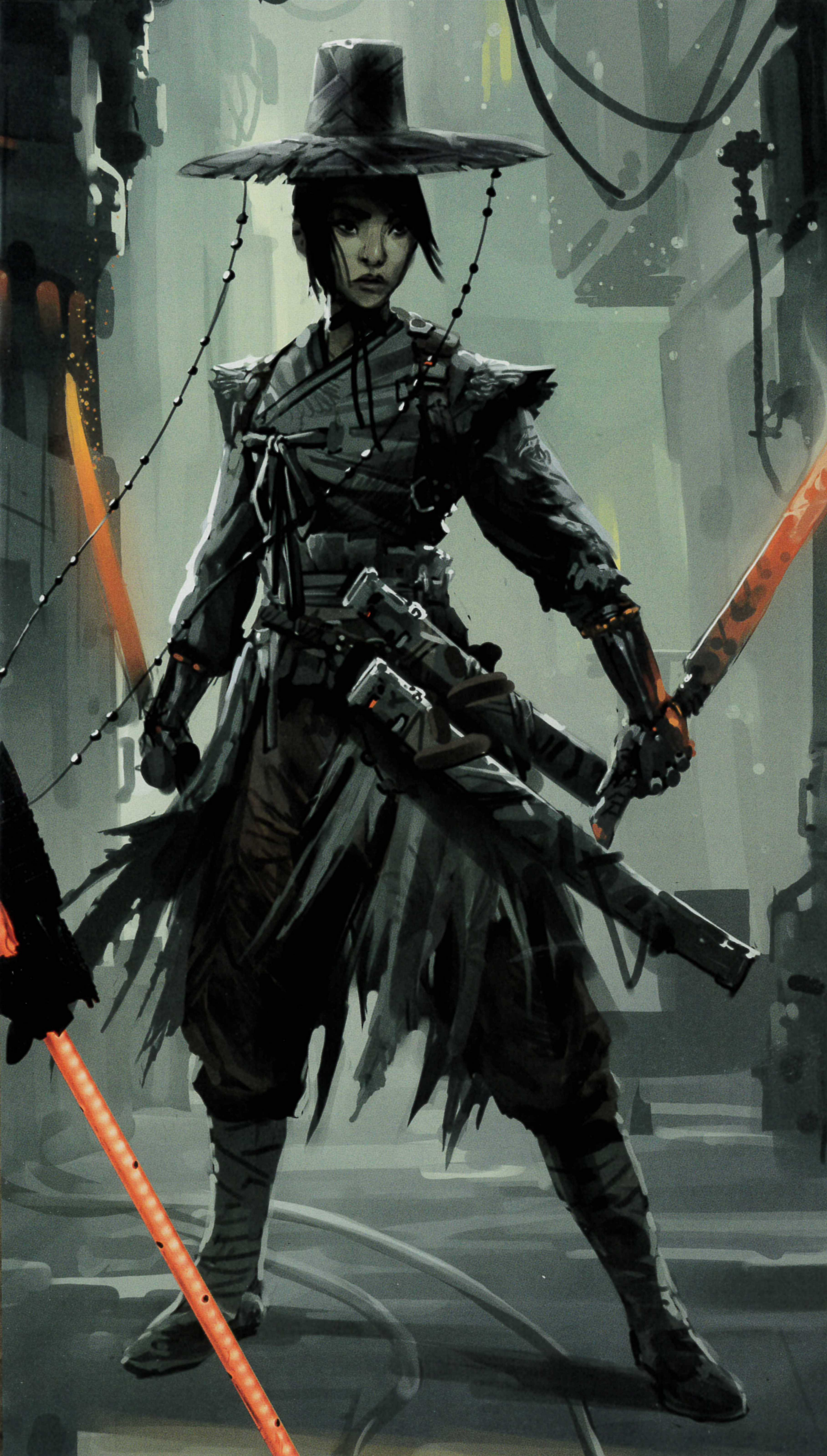
One way she maintains that unreadable mystique is through her carefully chosen wardrobe. Especially important are her face-obscuring, wide-brimmed hat and floor-length pants, both inspired by clothing from her native Korea. "When I walked into the first fitting for my costume, I was surprised by that Korean traditional hat—it's called a *gat*. So, Stephanie [Portnoy Porter] was studying and designing the look inspired by my background, and I was really grateful," Bae says. "I think the wide pants were kind of my idea. I showed her the picture of the wide pants in the swords martial art called *kendo* (*kondo* in Korean and *kendo* in Japanese). Their costume is their big, wide pants—very serious looking, very elegant-looking costume. If you're a great fighter, you don't reveal your feet. By covering your feet, no one knows which way you're going to move. You want to be more mysterious. You can't be read by anyone."

Finishing off her costume are her prosthetic, metal hands, which she finds strangely empowering, despite the difficulties they can cause. "You can't actually use your chopsticks with the hands, and you can't even tie your laces. I have to ask someone to open the [drink] can for me. I can't even use my phone. And it's so hot out here in the desert, but it's worth it," Bae relates. "They actually help me a lot to get into my character: 'My life is just for the fight. I don't need anything else. I don't eat, I don't sleep. I'm living for this revenge.' I love my outfit. And it looks so cool." But looking cool requires lots of power. "When I have a fight scene, I normally have five battery packs on my back, because my two arms light up, and then my two swords light up, and there's a wireless mic with me, it's the fifth. I'm a walking battery pack on set!"

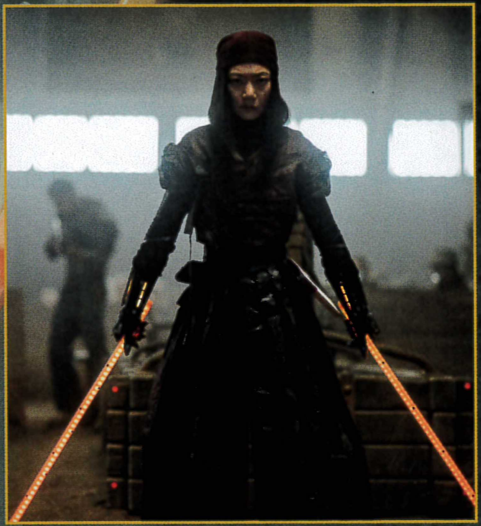
By joining Kora's cause, Nemesis ensures that there will be plenty of fodder to feed her ravenous blades and her unslakable appetite for vengeance; but when she gets to Veldt, she finds another reason to fight that allows her to reveal more of herself. "I don't think she was living her life. She was just there for revenge the whole time since that night everything was destroyed," Bae explains. "She's a great warrior, but at the same time she's a heartbroken mom and she has a really, really soft heart inside. She does her *kata* with the kids watching her. This *kata* is not a traditional one. It's more sword dancing, which is more flowing, and elegant, and more like meditating rather than just training. You can tell she's going through a lot and she's been meditating in this way. This is one of the rare chances to show her identity and then build up the relationship with Eljun, the brave boy."

Bae credits Snyder's ease of connecting with the actors for getting the best performance out of her. "His direction is so sharp and so accurate, and so helpful for actors. He knows how to open my heart with a key, so it's really easy for me to act," Bae says. "When he gives me a note, he doesn't talk about what it should look like. He tells me what I should feel inside. He says, 'I want you to feel this, so that it comes out from

▶ Nemesis faces off against the Krypteians.
▶▶ Concept for Nemesis in Daggus.



that feeling.'" She also remarks on his incredible powers of observation and ability to multitask on set. "He must have ten brains in his head working at the same time. We were shooting a scene all tied up on [exoskeleton] chairs. It was Kora's tighter shot, so I was in the background. You can't see my face, but of course I acted. I reacted to Kora's acting. After the shot, Zack came up to me and said, 'Remember what you just did for later for your pickups.' That means he was watching everybody, like five or six actors, and he was looking at each one. I'm still like, 'Wow. I don't know how he does that,'" she says.



▲▼ Nemesis makes the ultimate sacrifice while defending Eljun (Caden Dragomer) from a Krypteian (Richard Cetrone).

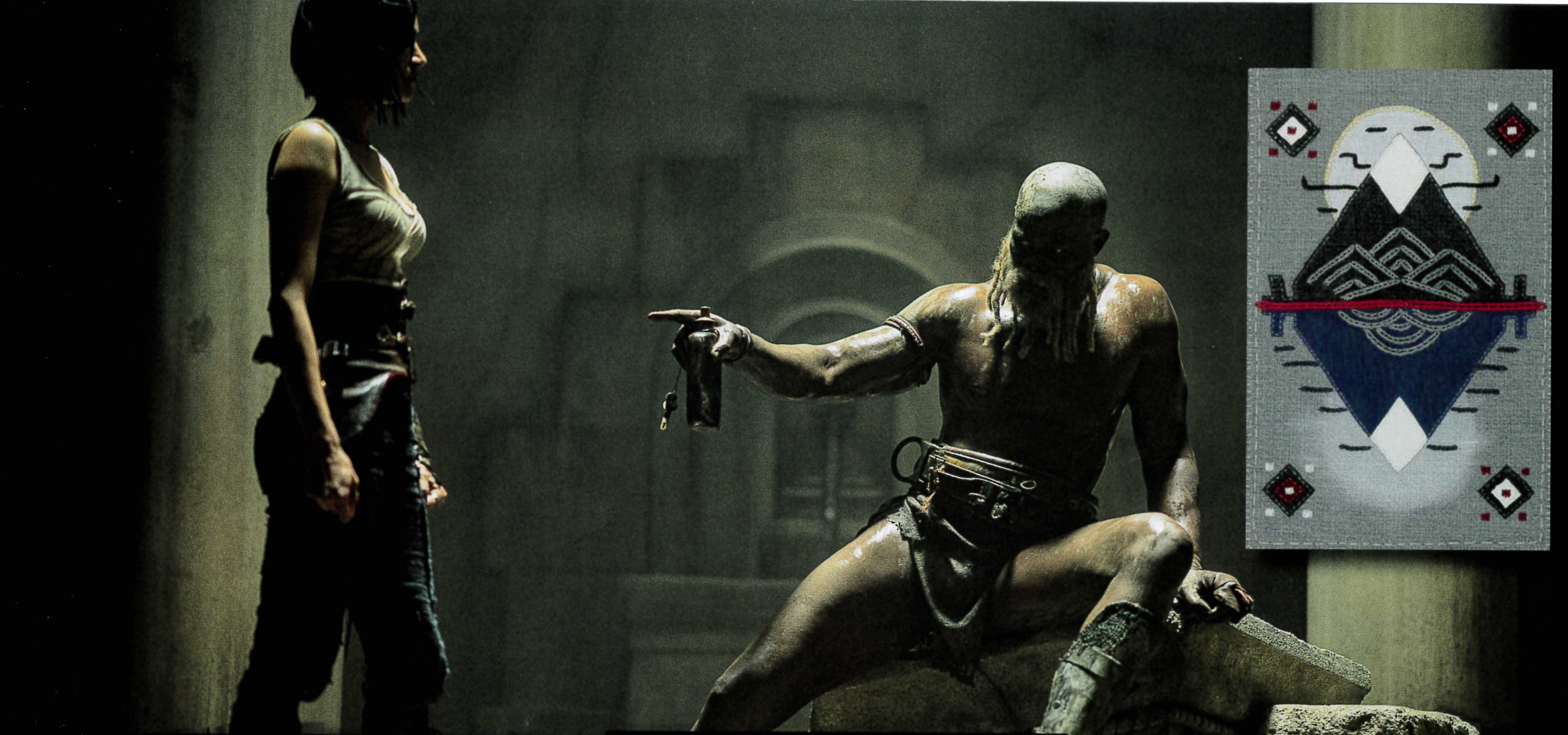
HEROES

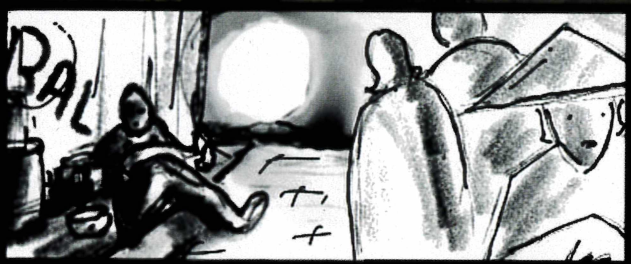
GENERAL TITUS

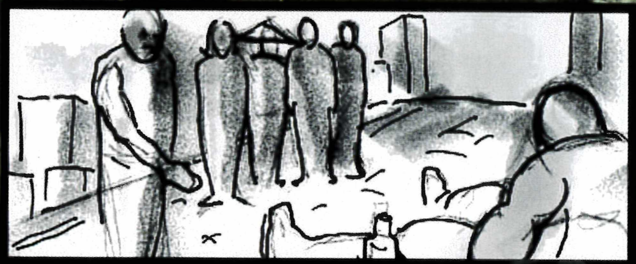
TITUS'S EARLY LIFE, in many ways, parallels Kora's grim childhood. "His planet was conquered by the King's armies when he was a child. He grew up in the schools of the Motherworld and immersed himself in their culture, and became this gifted military mind," Snyder explains. Titus's story, however, took a slightly different turn after the King's assassination. "He was one of the great generals of the King's armies, but when Balisarius took over he couldn't fight for the new regime. Their brutally was a thing he couldn't stand for," Snyder says.

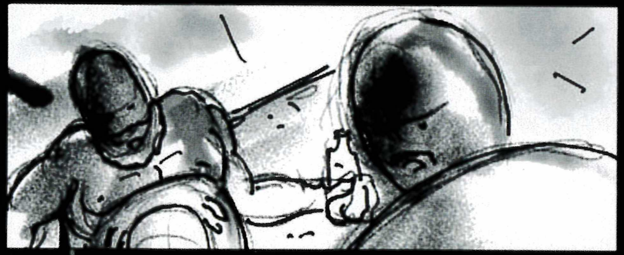
Djimon Hounsou (*Amistad*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Shazam*) takes up the tale of his noble-minded character. "The Regent asked him to exterminate an entire population, and given the nature of General Titus, he refused. So, he went rogue. The Motherworld sent an entire regiment to hunt him down [on Sarawu], and he was forced to watch his remaining men being executed," he relates. By the time we meet Titus—a down-and-out, drunken gladiator passed out on the streets of Pollux—the trauma of seeing the decimation of his troops and the destruction of Sarawu has clearly taken its toll on the once proud warrior.

General Titus cares more about the flask than fighting when Kora finds him.



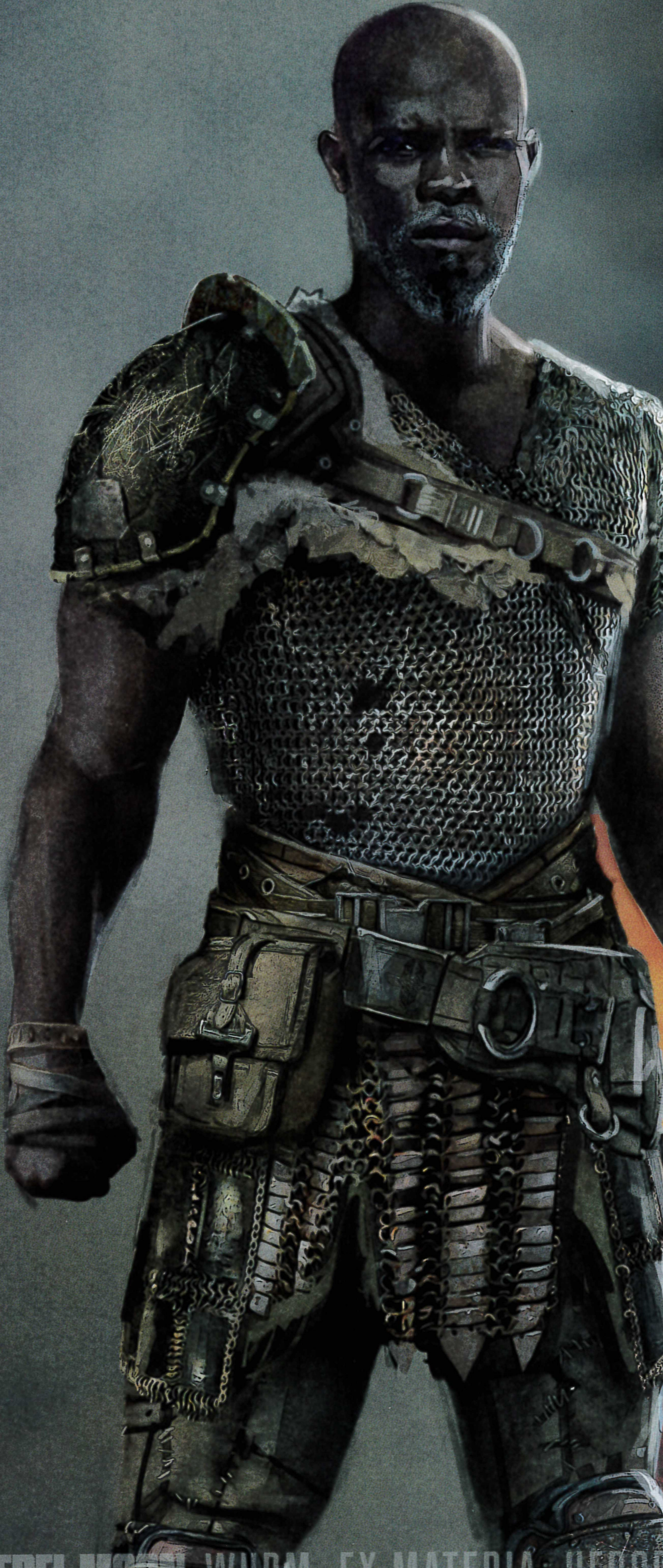






▲▲▶ Titus's mountain banner.

▼ In a flashback, a rebellious Titus surrenders on Sarawu.

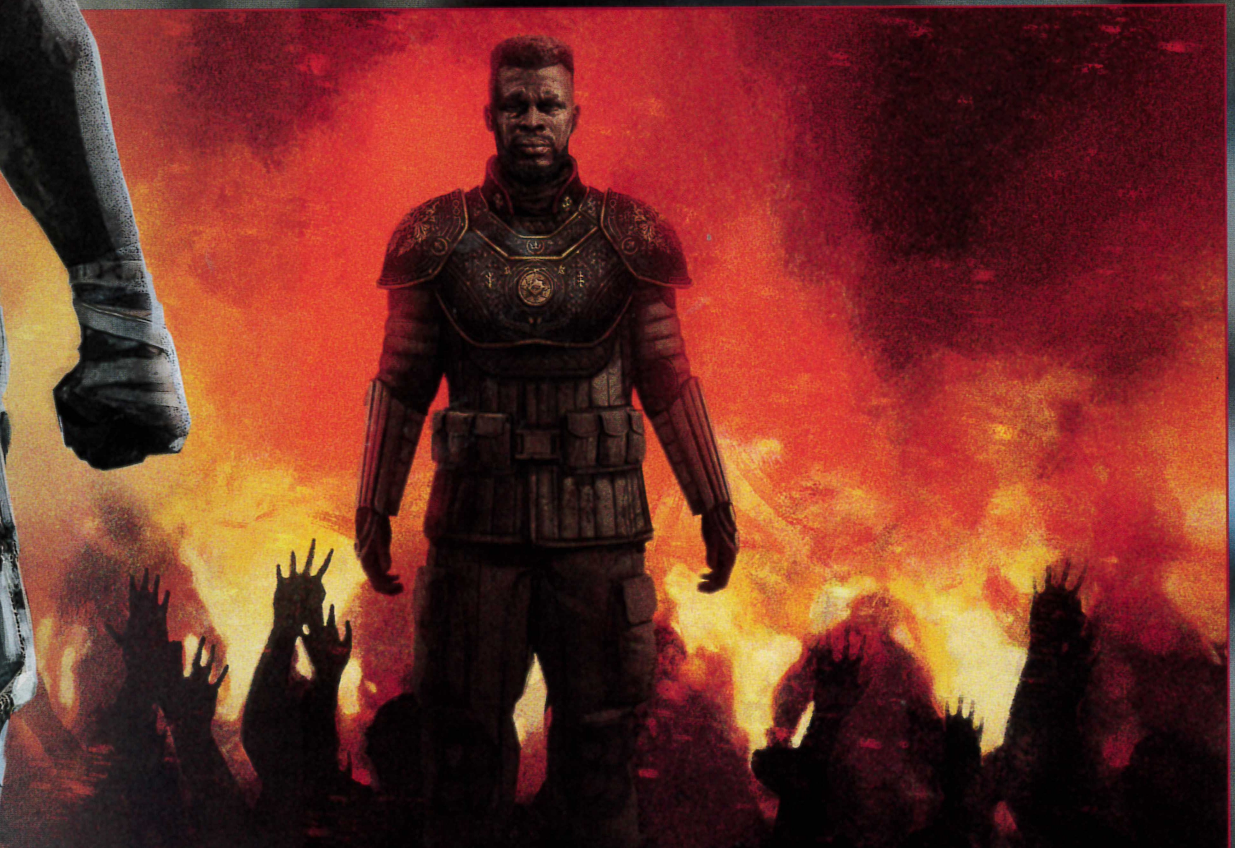


Despite at first refusing even to admit who he is, Titus cannot maintain his shell of nihilism and defeat once he commits to Kora's cause and the people of Veldt. "General Titus is very honorable. For a war soldier, he's very compassionate," says Hounsou. "I felt General Titus throughout the story is somebody with an inherent obligation to give self to what is just, what is right. General Titus is a defender of the innocent and oppressed. He seems to be a man of the people, more so than the system. And at this point, the vengeance he goes into is justified." With his tactical genius, his deep understanding of the Motherworld's war machine, and his personal fighting prowess, he is a vital addition to the team—once he's cleaned and sobered up, that is.

Being in the thick of many of the fights was something Hounsou found fun, but also very demanding, especially when you consider the dynamic nature of this shoot. "When you get to the location and to the environment in which you must execute the stunt, everything changes," Hounsou explains. "And so, thankfully, given the fact that I've had a bit of martial arts background, and MMA, and so on, it was fairly comfortable to execute. But it was certainly difficult fighting that many people at the same time, all grouped together, and the space is very limited. It was quite challenging."

The actor also found something that he was called on to do during the celebration after the harvest every bit as challenging as hand-to-hand combat. "It was the first time I ever did this—where I had to sing in the midst of all of these people. I've been hearing that it gets your attention. I hope it plays well," he says. The opportunity to sing a soldier's ballad in Fon, a language from his native Benin, was a high point of the production for Hounsou.

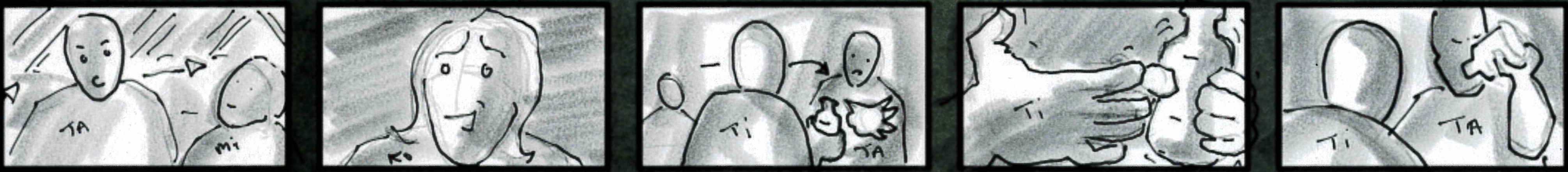
In addition to their characters experiencing similar childhood suffering, Hounsou and co-star Sofia Boutella discovered through conversations that their real-life paths have also been eerily parallel. "He is from Africa, like me. He moved to France when he was twelve; I was ten. He moved to America when he was twenty-three. I moved to LA when I was twenty-three," says Boutella.



◀ Concepts for Titus the gladiator and Titus the general.

▶ Titus has lost everything.

Titus- Well I'll Drink to that Kora- How's the water? Titus - What?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◀▶ Titus finds new purpose on Veldt.

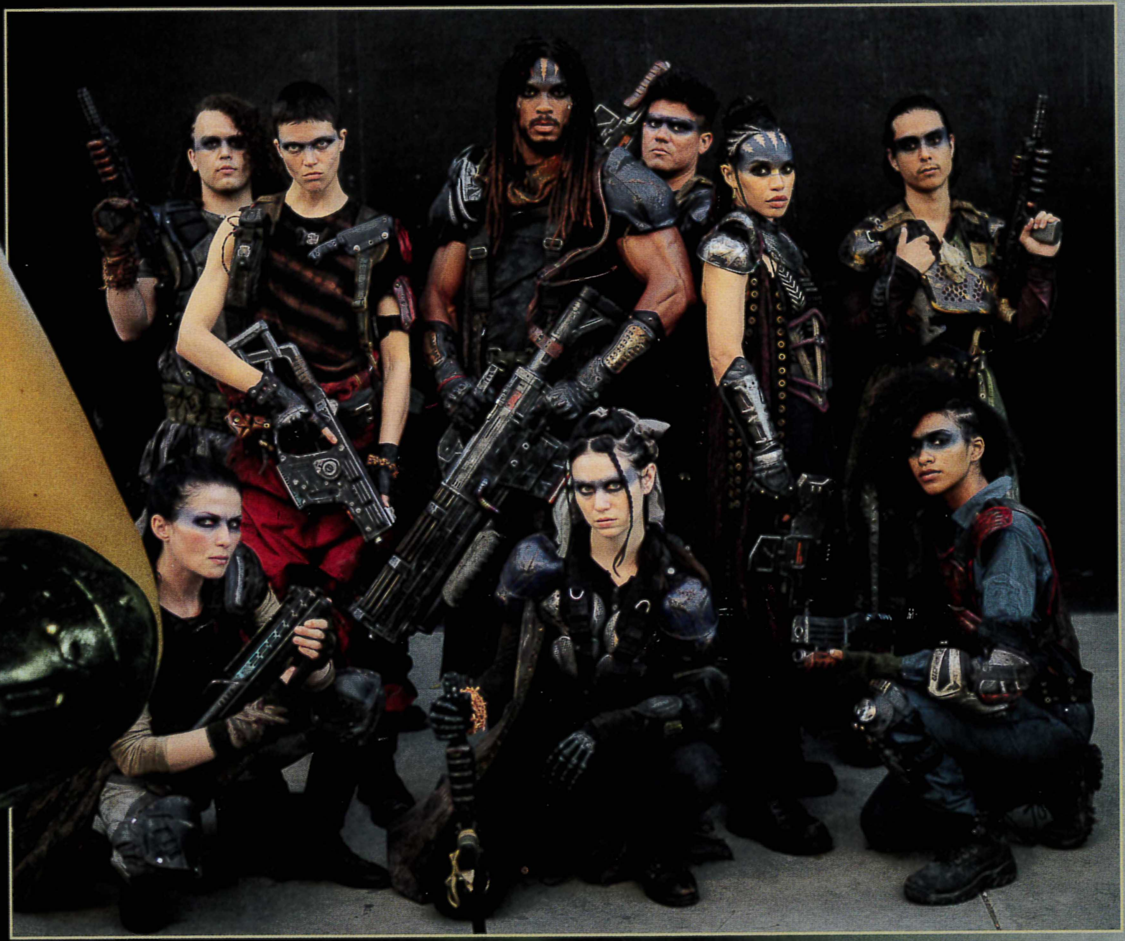
Hounsou also discovered an unexpected linkage to another *Rebel Moon* colleague: Zack Snyder. "The call came in from my agent saying, 'Zack Snyder, who you have worked with, is looking for you for an interesting project.' So, I said, 'No, I have never worked with Zack Snyder.' I mean, I would know, right?" Hounsou recalls. "But I came to find out that Zack and I met ages ago when I first came to California as a model from Paris. He happened to be one of the student filmmakers/photographers who took pictures of me back in the day in Pasadena at ArtCenter [College of Design]. I've watched a number of his works over time, thinking to myself, 'It would be wonderful to work with him.' Not knowing that I had met him decades before."

HEROES

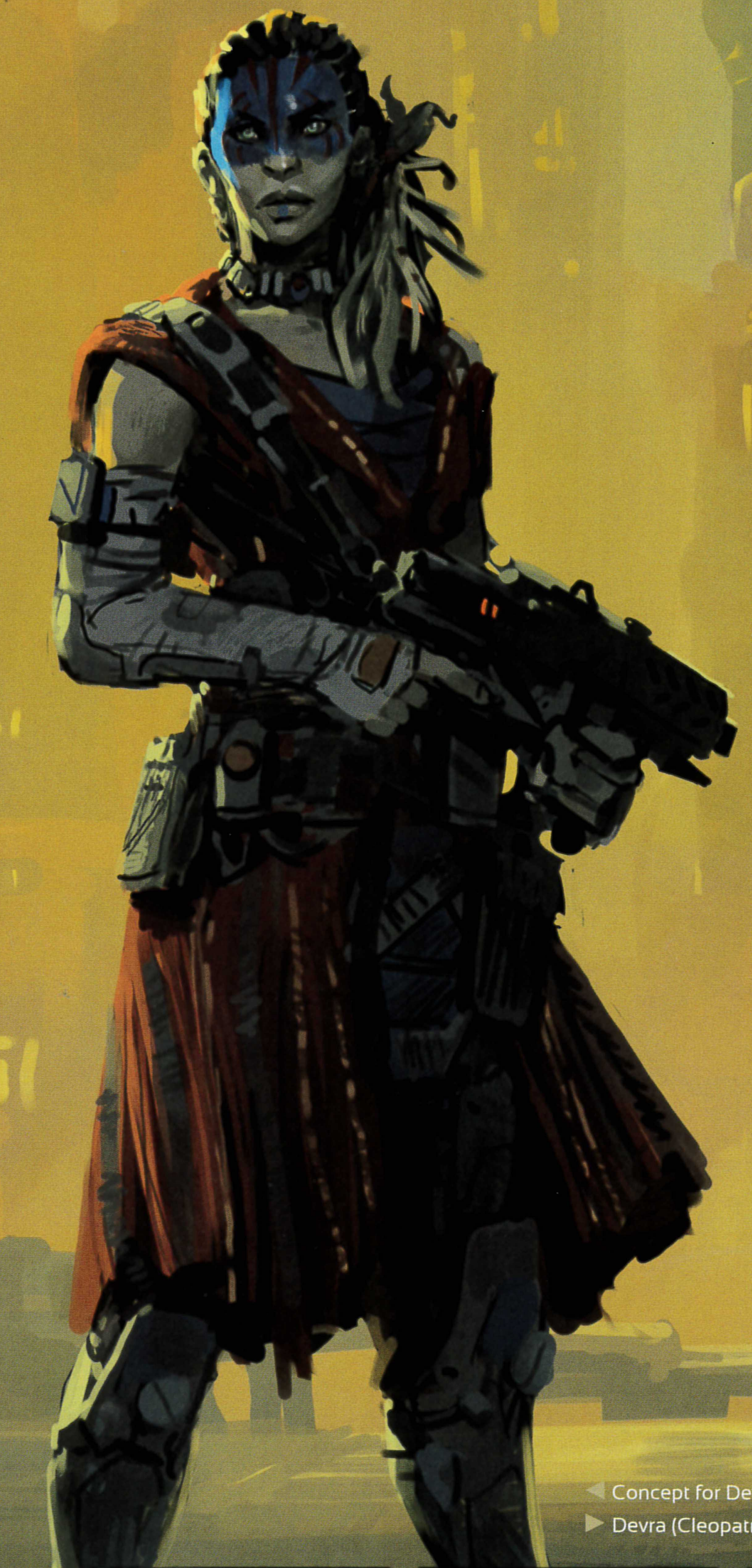
DEVRA BLOODAXE

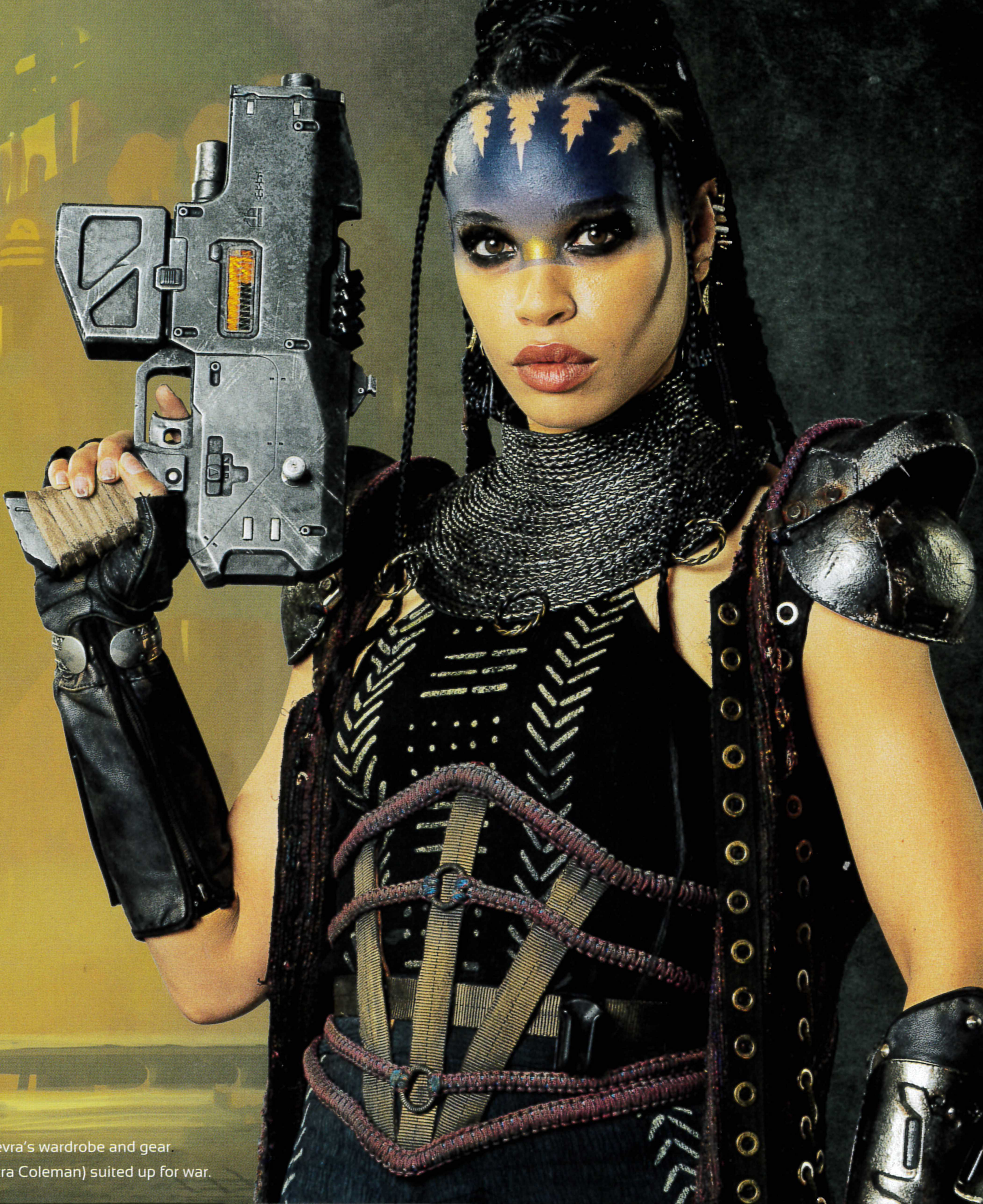
THE BLOODAXE SIBLINGS, Devra and Darrian, have been at the center of a hardened group of freedom fighters standing up to the Motherworld for several years. "They're really a very small insurgency on the edge of the galaxy, on the run," Snyder explains. "They do a little guerrilla warfare on the shipping lanes. They're constantly a pain in the ass, if you will, for the Motherworld, but not much more than that. But they see this small farming community rising against this giant army as an opportunity for them to put their beliefs to the test."

Cleopatra Coleman (*The Last Man on Earth*, *White Famous*) ascribes the rebel band's successes thus far to a mix of impassioned leadership and pragmatic tactics. "They're this very fierce warrior tribe, and they have this really intense moral and spiritual outlook on things, which is why I think they've been able to mobilize and be the biggest threat to date," she says. "They've been running away from Noble for quite some time, and they've figured out a way to attack and then hide. They're really, really good at that, and that's how they survive." She adds, "Especially in this polarizing world that we're in, it's very cool to see an example of people standing up and doing the right thing, and being courageous and strong in the face of adversity."



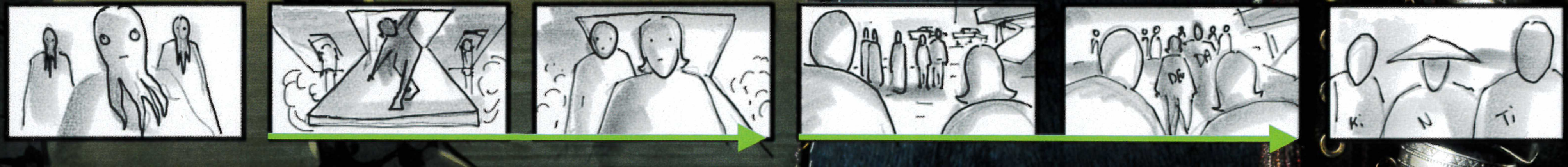
▲ The Bloodaxe Crew: (front row, left to right) Sarah Raftery, Tabitha Petrini, Ava Monet; (back row, left to right) Alexander Voznick, E. Duffy, Ray Fisher, Hassani Rizzo, Cleopatra Coleman, Arturo Tolentino.





◀ Concept for Devra's wardrobe and gear.

▶ Devra (Cleopatra Coleman) suited up for war.



She also thinks that while brother and sister are nominally equal commanders of their insurgency, Devra might just be a little bit more equal. "Devra co-leads with her brother Darrian, but I think she's the real leader. I do," she asserts. "She's kind of the brains, and Darrian is the brawn. Darrian is kind of emotional. He'll act on a whim, and Devra's almost like a politician. She doesn't take a single step before considering every angle and how it impacts the entire group, even if it's an unpopular choice. She's willing to put her emotions aside, whereas Darrian wears his heart on his sleeve and does whatever he feels he needs to do. They have their differences. They argue, as any other brother and sister, but they love each other. They care about each other. So, I think they work really well together for that reason, because they are each opposite sides of the same coin."

The process by which she got the role was unusually swift, but Coleman feels it was almost predestined. "I was asked to tape [an audition] two weeks before I stepped on the set. It was this crazy thing where they were like, 'Hey, can you do a tape for this Zack Snyder movie?' And I, weirdly, immediately thought, 'I'm going to get this.' I don't know why. Then a couple of weeks later, I get a call saying, 'You got it,' just off of one tape," she relates. "I'm a massive sci-fi/fantasy fan myself, so this is literally a dream come true. It's a massive, massive beast, this movie, but it's extremely exciting."

Australian Coleman also credits her costar and onscreen brother with ushering her into the belly of this "beast." "Ray [Fisher], because he worked with Zack before, he knows this type of film and how it goes down. He did such a good job of prepping me and welcoming me in and letting me know what to expect. So, thank you, Ray!"

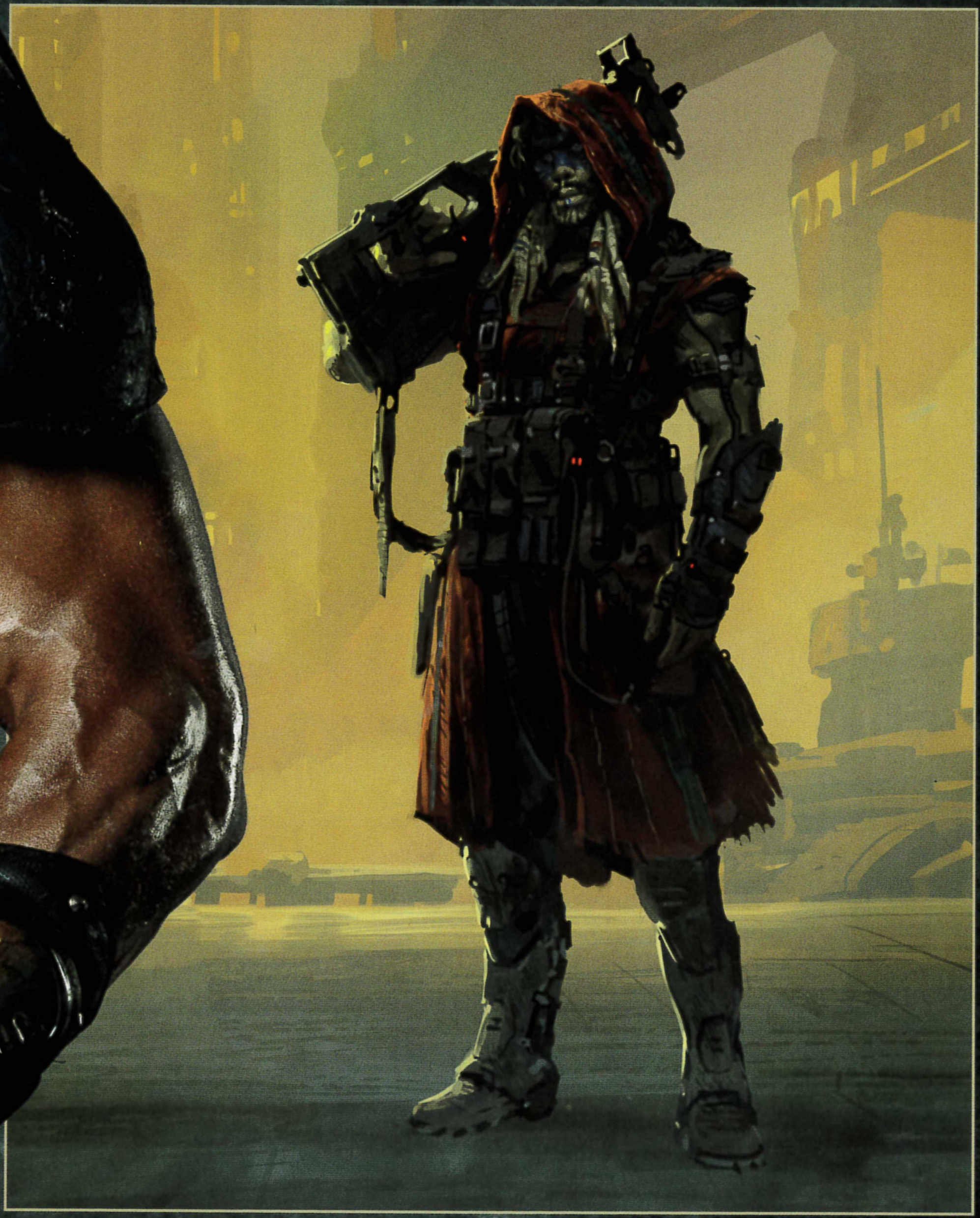
Something else that helped Coleman find her footing as the rebel leader was stepping into Devra's empowering fighting ensemble, complete with gun and sword. "Devra wears this amazing outfit—I would describe it as a cross between a samurai and an African warrior," she says. "It is regal, but it's also utilitarian, it's tactile. It's this cape—tattered, so it tells the story of how rough it's been—and these samurai-style pants with African print on them. It's got this space armor and combat boots, and then this corset that really pulls me into gear. The moment that I put that on, I was like, 'Okay, she's here. Devra's here.'"

▶ The Bloodaxe siblings.

HEROES

DARRIAN BLOODAXE

RAY FISHER (*True Detective, Zack Snyder's Justice League*) agrees with a lot of what Cleopatra Coleman says about his character. "He's a liberator, first and foremost, and I believe Darrian is someone who leads absolutely with his heart and his soul," says Fisher. "Devra is much more pragmatic, logic based. Darrian leads with what he feels, and is one of those individuals who can inspire those around him simply by being himself. With any revolution, with any sort of uprising, you need both halves of that equation in order to find the solution to taking down the Motherworld."



▲ Concept for Darrian and his big gun.

▲ Darrian Bloodaxe (Ray Fisher) takes a leap of faith.

◀ Concepts for various insurgent pilot helmets.

Freedom isn't just a catchphrase with the Bloodaxes. They practice what they preach. "They form this sort of democratic society, wherein they've gone from planet to planet attempting to liberate folks from the Motherworld. The way they run their group is a free-will environment: You can come when you want, you can leave when you want. It's the antithesis of the Realm," he says. "Ultimately, what draws Bloodaxe to Kora and Gunnar and the rest of the crew is the purity of their mission, and that speaks to him. Darrian in this film is saying, 'Listen. This feat, the attempt to take down *The King's Gaze*, the mere attempt of it will inspire countless others to our cause.'"

▲ Darrian battles Motherworld soldiers on the docks above Gondival.

Besides getting to work with Snyder again, what drew Fisher to the part was a chance to play this selfless warrior, willing to sacrifice it all for his comrades and the cause. "The Battle of Gondival, it's gotta be my favorite scene. It's the first time we get to see all of the heroes together. We get to see our antagonist, Noble, in the mix as well," he explains. "Zack called me on the phone, he was like, 'We've got this crazy battle at the end of the first movie. We want you to do this thing where you jump off a crane, and there's going to be a long run you do that basically saves the day, otherwise everybody would get taken out.' And I'm like, 'Done. I'm there. Easy.' I got to do a lot of my own stunts, a lot of jumping, a lot of combat stuff, and that's something I've never really had any experience in prior to this. So, it was a really good shift."

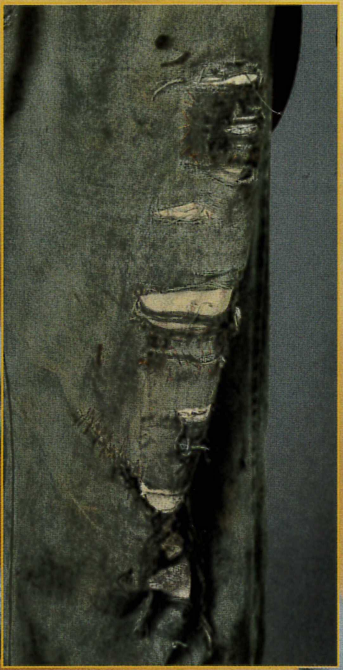
Another, not-insignificant reason for Fisher signing up for *Rebel Moon* was knowing that he'd be going into combat in style. "You can't really beat the looks in a Zack Snyder film. You really can't," he says. "Darrian wears this awesome war paint. The dreads are great. Having dreads in a movie is kind of like having a cape for a superhero. I describe the Bloodaxes' attire as being space vintage-store chic. They go around, and from every world that they liberate, they end up taking armor and accessories, anything that they can use to help move the rebellion forward." The same can be said for his signature firearm. "Despite what you may think, Darrian Bloodaxe doesn't have an actual axe in this piece. He carries this massive weapon, something that was confiscated and he keeps as a trophy. He has notches on there for every elite Motherworld soldier that he's been able to take down with that thing. There's all these crazy nuances and things you may see, even in the smallest of details," Fisher says.

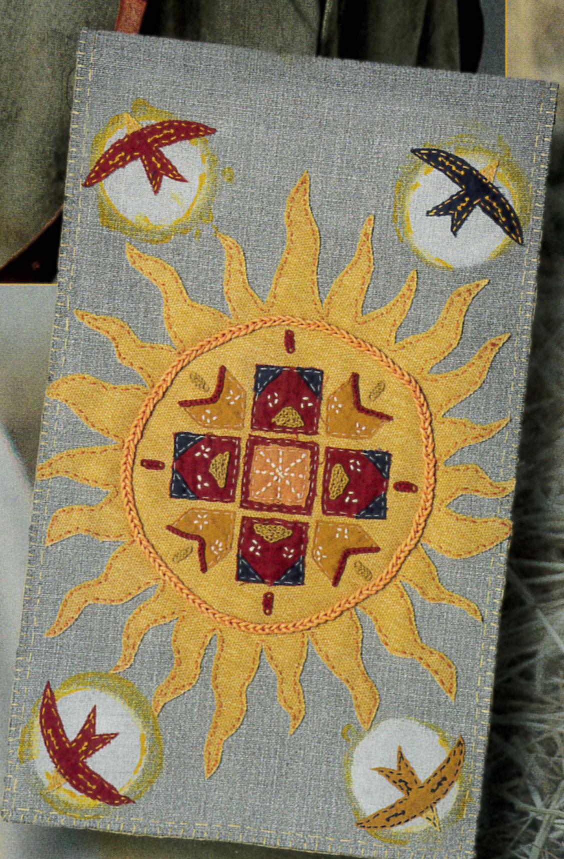
MILIUS

THE ONLY FIGHTER FROM THE INSURGENCY to follow Darrian Bloodaxe over to Kora's cause is a slightly built youth named Milius. But don't let their size fool you. "They have this skillset of incredible athleticism, a quick learner, and this potential that's inside them that they bring out in the heat of combat, so that we find an amazing warrior. The opportunity for them to rise in this conflict is really an important arc for them," Snyder says.

E. Duffy plays this budding freedom fighter, hailing from humble roots on their homeworld of Meadai. "Milius grew up in a pretty provincial area. Their planet was kind of homogeneous and hermetic, self sustaining. Then their planet was taken over by the Motherworld," Duffy explains. "They see all their loved ones die before them, or just ripped apart from them. They're sent to a prison camp, where they're sentenced to a life of hard labor and abuse. Somehow they're freed by this rebel group, and they become very loyal and dedicated to learning how to be a warrior. I don't know if it's survivor's guilt, but if I was given this second chance at life, I'd have to make something of it. You have to have something to be invested in to give yourself a sense of purpose."

▲▼▶ Through flashbacks and over the course of two films, Milius finds their place amongst the other rebels



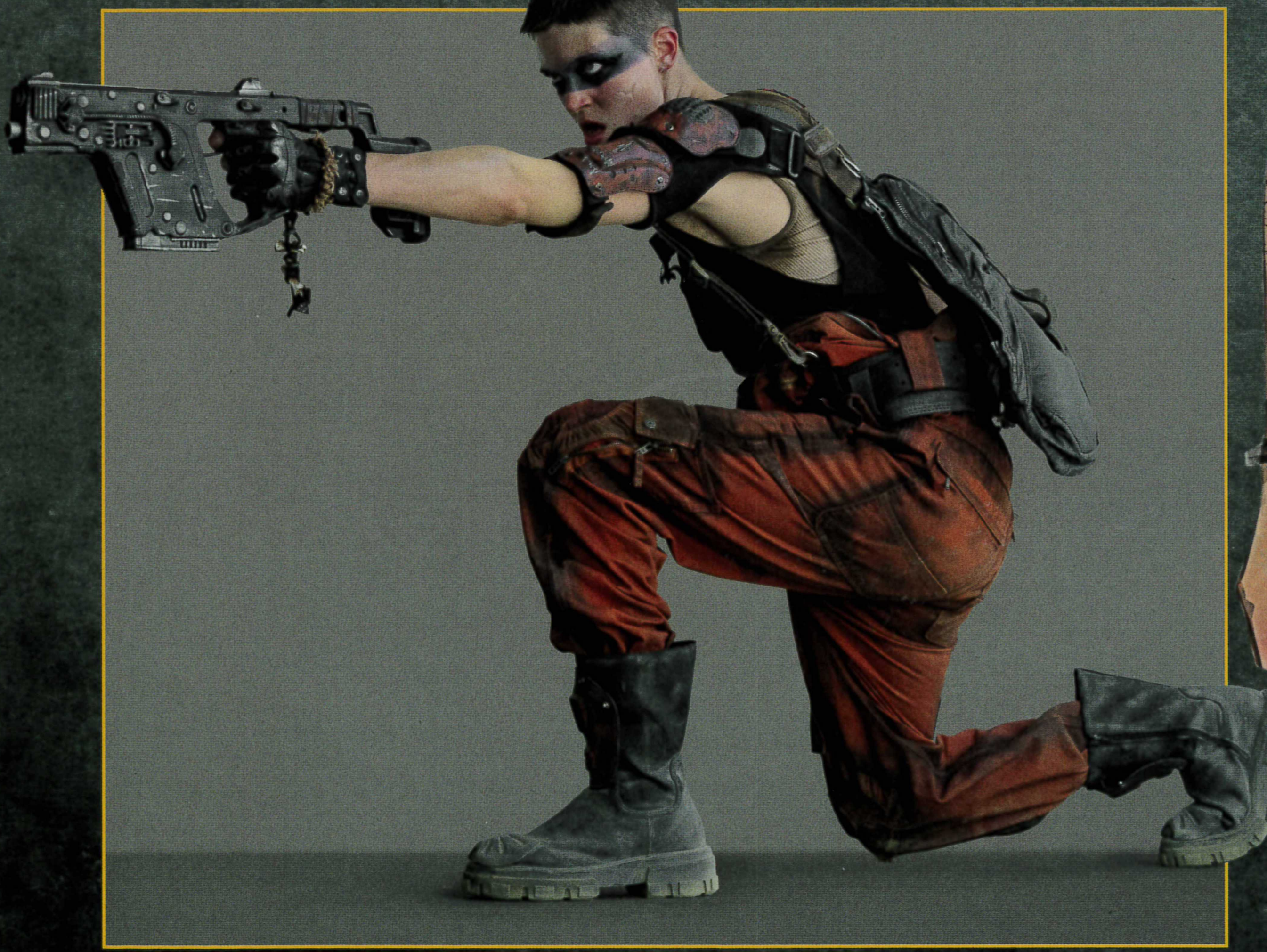


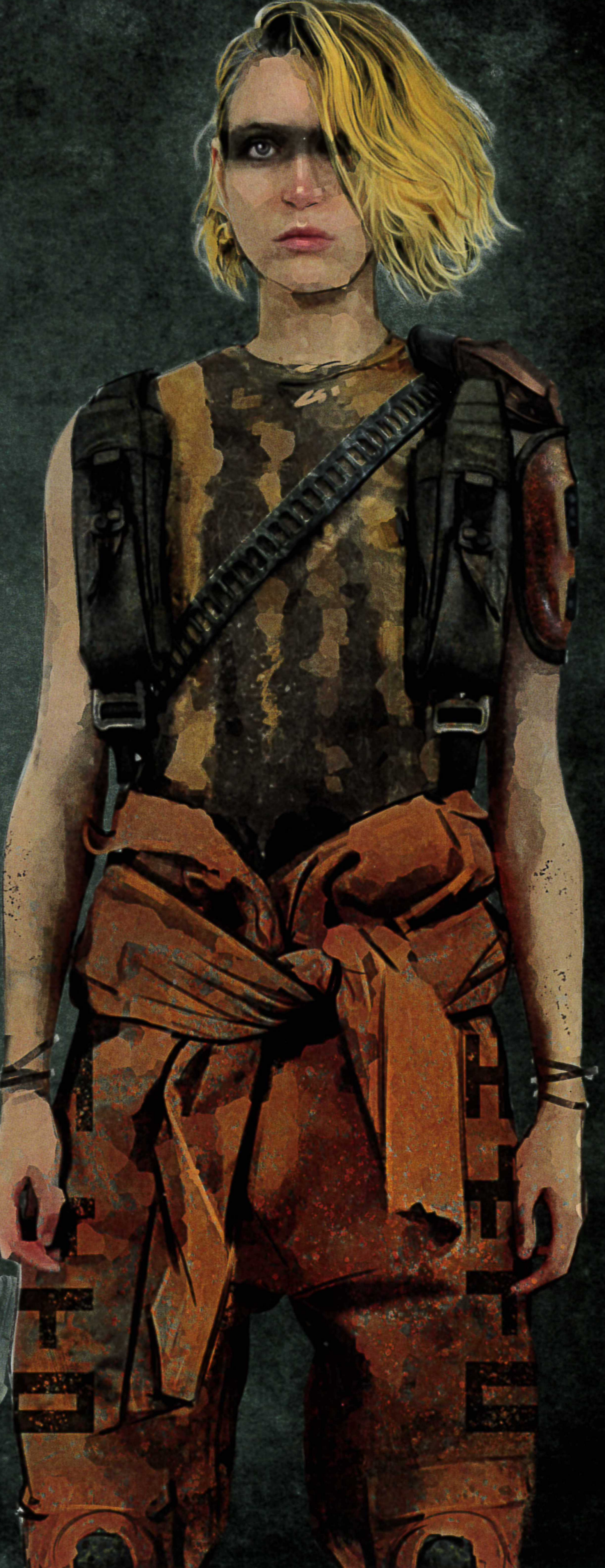
▶ Milius's sun banner.

The double tragedy is that Milius ultimately loses their newfound source of guidance and inspiration, Darrian Bloodaxe. "I slowly earn my stripes. I become his protege. He's like the fuckin' man to me!" Duffy says. "Then Bloodaxe dies, and it's back to square one all over again. I thought I could follow this dude and do the right thing and everything would work out. I would feel I had a sense of family and home again, and now that's all gone. They could have given up, but they have to put all their attention into this new family of the warriors that have been collected from around the universe."

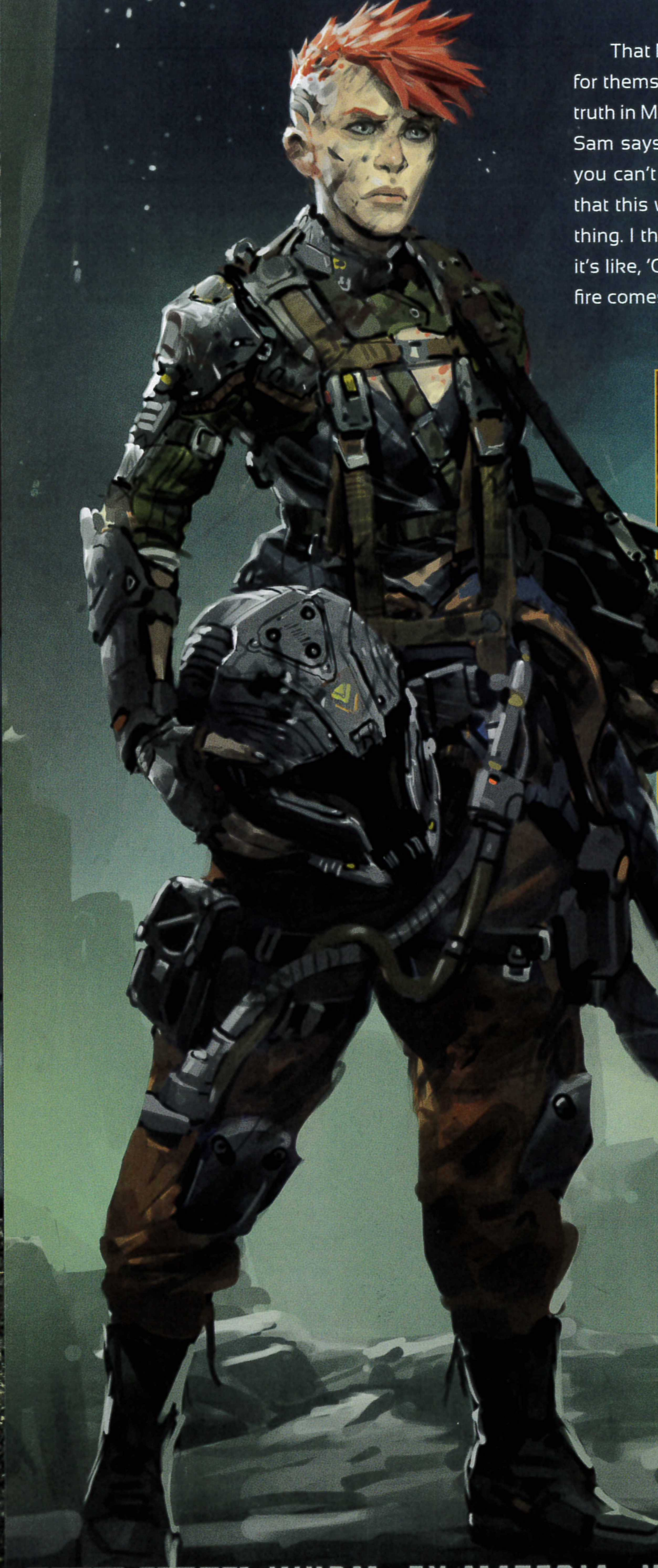
Milius wears a distinctive set of garb befitting the scrappy hero. "The costume is so sick. It's this awesome mix of different items of clothing to create this warrior look," Duffy says. "My costume is a jumpsuit that has been assembled from many jumpsuits. The amount of care and detail that's gone into the jumpsuit alone, it's insane. It's got these cool zippers going all sorts of directions. They burnt it so it looks all distressed. There's motocross kneepads, and then an electrician's belt that's attached to utilitarian suspenders. The costume designer is incredible, and was very thoughtful from the beginning about Milius's costume. Stephanie [Portnoy Porter] was so careful. We'd be like, 'Okay, the sleeves are fitting right, but the waist is hitting a little too high.' We had a lot of talks about gender, too, and they were super open and willing to hear me on that, which was very exciting for this industry."

▶ Concept for Milius.
◀ Milius in the trenches on Veldt.





That Milius is extremely brave can't be denied, but what they come to embody for themself and the larger community is even more. "There's an eternal sense of truth in Milius's heart, that there is a right and wrong," Duffy explains. "In one scene Sam says Milius is like the sun—steadfast and true, this fiery ball of something you can't really contain, but it's always there the next morning. It's making sure that this whole ecosystem of the world keeps on working together and doing its thing. I think a lot of it has to do with seeing somebody die for a cause, and then it's like, 'Okay, but you can also live for this cause.' I think that is really where the fire comes from."



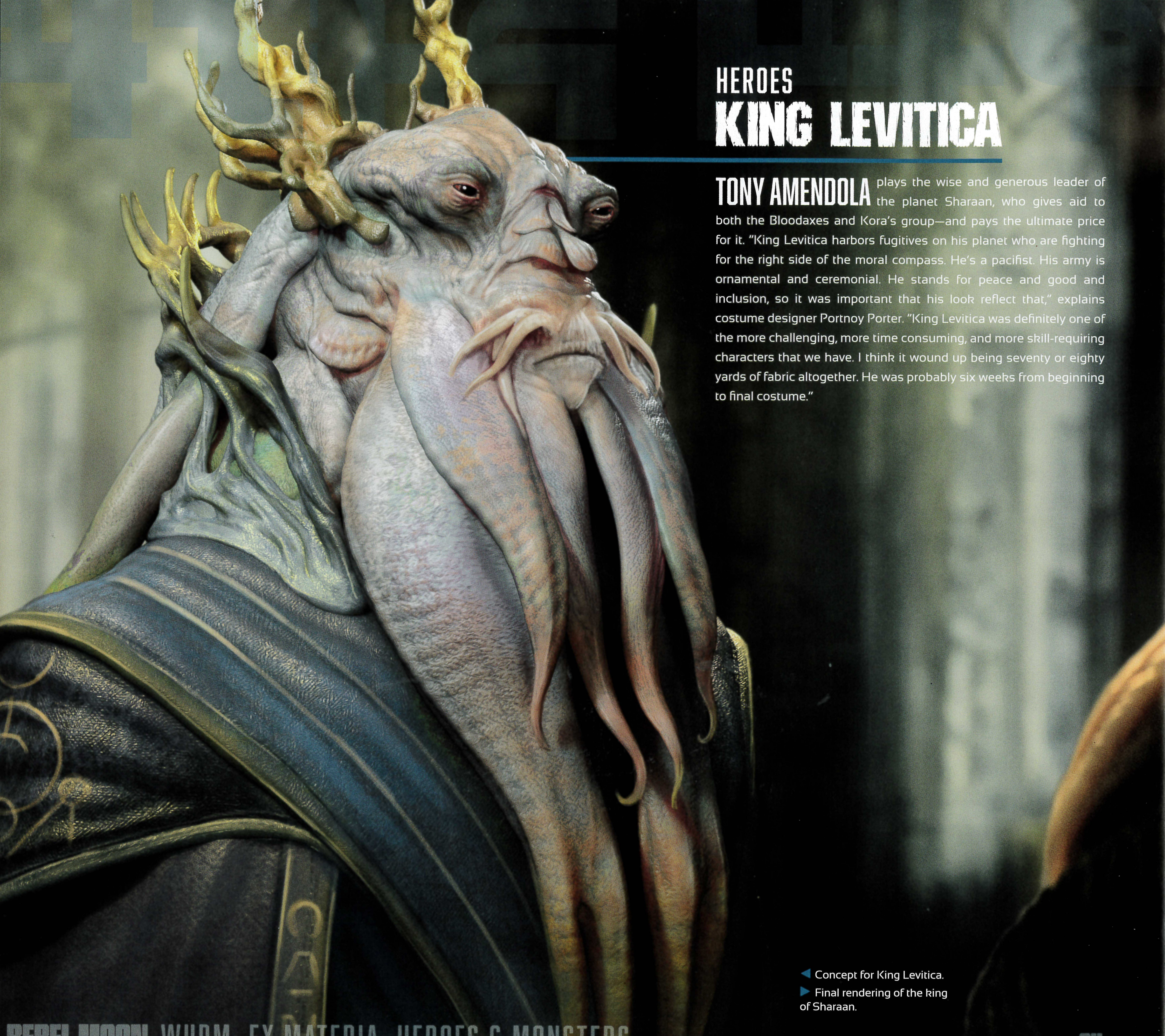
▲▼ Details of Milius's wardrobe.

▶▶ Milius prepares a big surprise for the Imperials.

HEROES

KING LEVITICA

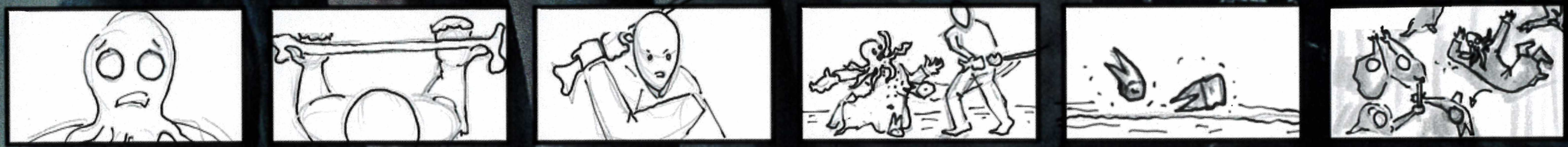
TONY AMENDOLA plays the wise and generous leader of the planet Sharaan, who gives aid to both the Bloodaxes and Kora's group—and pays the ultimate price for it. "King Levitica harbors fugitives on his planet who are fighting for the right side of the moral compass. He's a pacifist. His army is ornamental and ceremonial. He stands for peace and good and inclusion, so it was important that his look reflect that," explains costume designer Portnoy Porter. "King Levitica was definitely one of the more challenging, more time consuming, and more skill-requiring characters that we have. I think it wound up being seventy or eighty yards of fabric altogether. He was probably six weeks from beginning to final costume."



◄ Concept for King Levitica.

► Final rendering of the king of Sharaan.

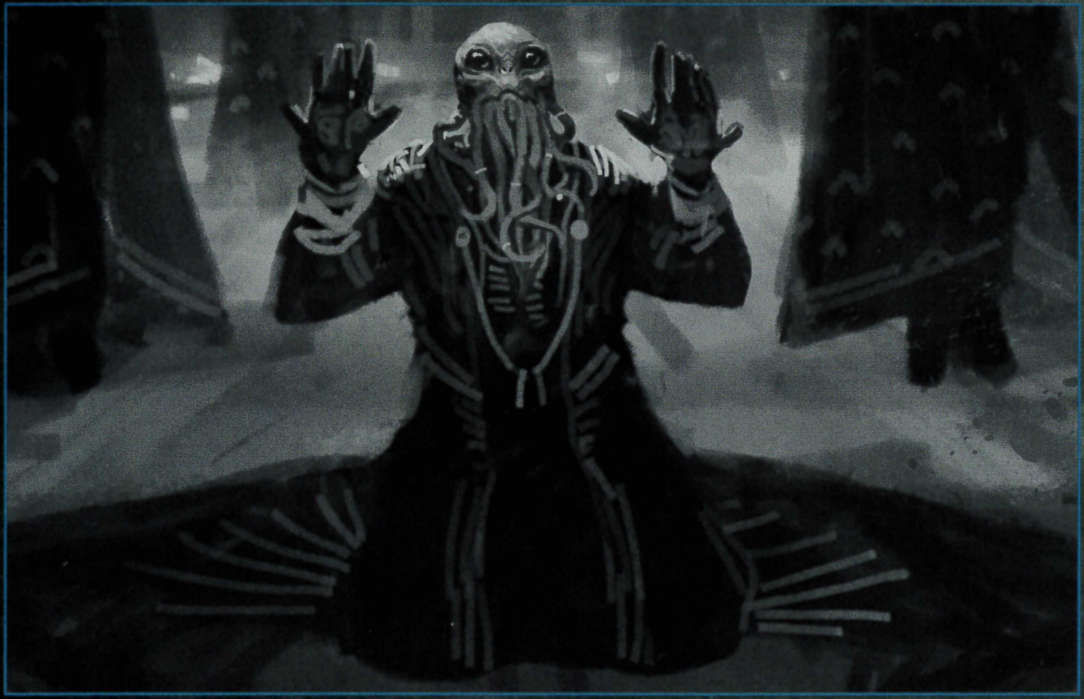
◀▲▼ Details of Levitica's royal garments.

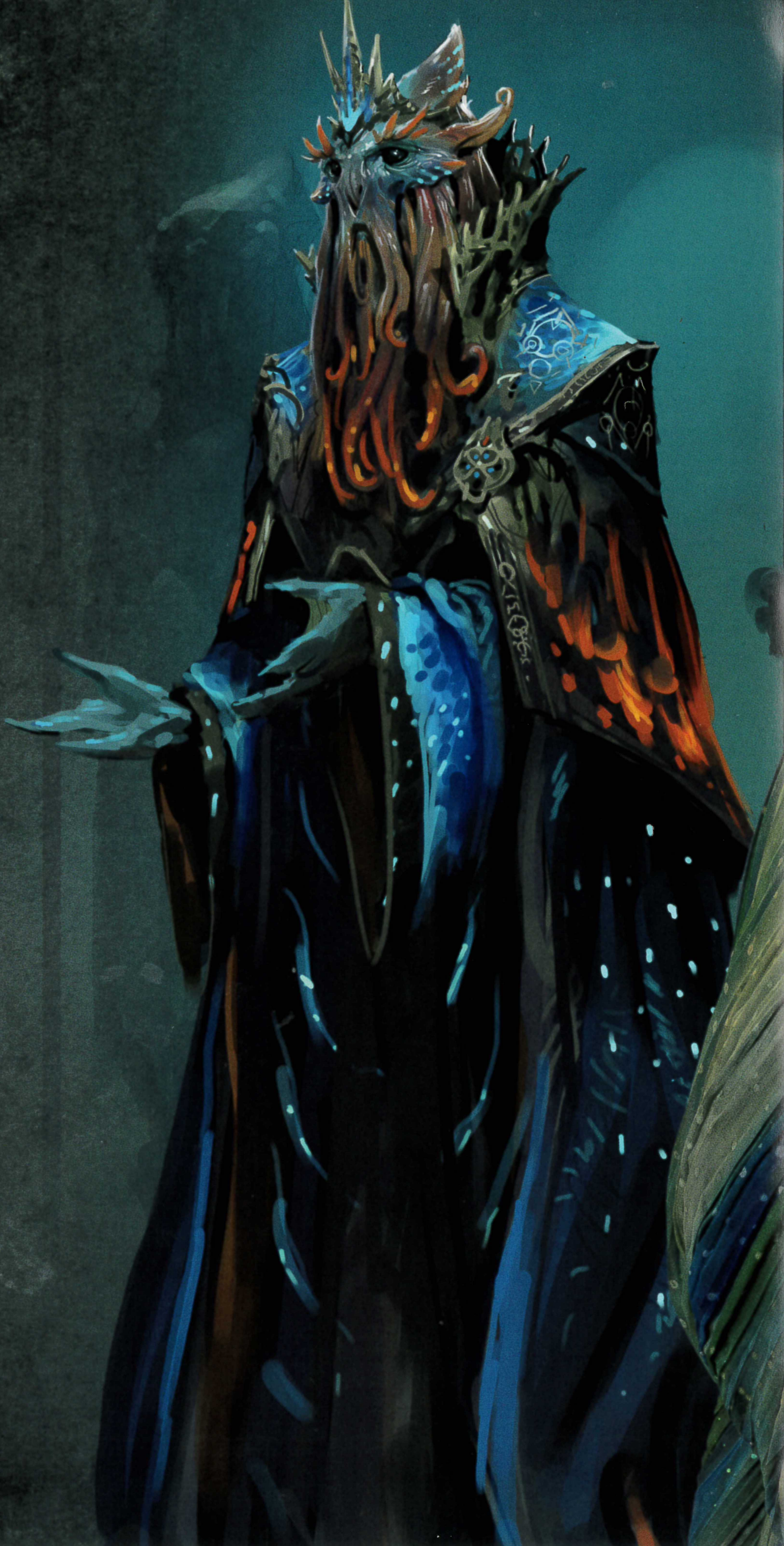


With the character's cephalopod facial features (rendered by creature designer Justin Raleigh, following ideas from Snyder), perhaps it's not surprising that his costume drew inspiration from the sea—but also, strangely enough, from Paris. "I wanted to come up with something that was flowing and ethereal, and also weird," says Portnoy Porter. "I found all of these really incredible photographs of deep-sea fish and creatures that had bioluminescence. My reference for the light aspect was a paddlefish, so [the costume] has all these points of light. The thought was, when he was interacting with people that meant no harm, you would see this relaxed heart rate, like breathing the light. That contrasts with when he was confronted by the Motherworld, where this light would start to become a little bit more erratic. Then finally, when his character was killed, the light would eventually go out completely. So, our layers and layers of fabric, that were all painted individually, we flicked with an adhesive onto one of the layers and put reflective foil on those little points, so that when the light on stage hit it, it almost did the same thing as real, practical light, but in a much more subtle way.

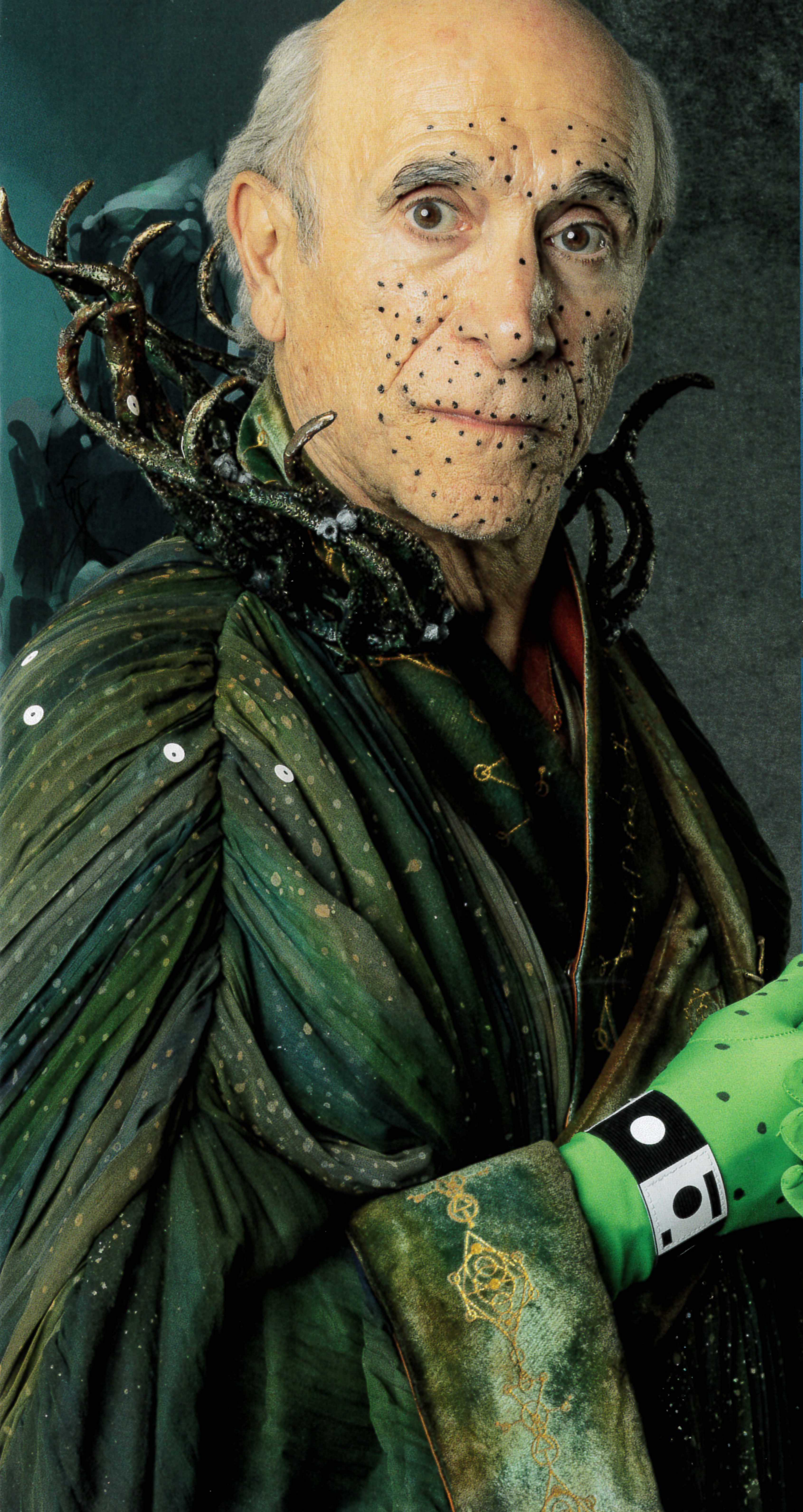
"I'm a big fan of early 1900s fashion—layers upon layers, several different types of pleating. So, there was a lot of Fortuny techniques in King Levitica," Portnoy Porter continues. "The idea was that there's this orange color that's coming up, and there's this blue and green mixed color with these flecks of light and absence of color—almost like when you look in a swimming pool and the sun is out, and it's always moving. Mostly creating that fell on the shoulders of Sharon Fauvel, who is our incredible textile artist extraordinaire. She used to live in Paris and worked in fashion, and she told me she had been taught to do certain velvet burnout and painting techniques by someone who had been taught by someone, who had been taught by someone, who had been taught by Mariano Fortuny himself. She has this knowledge that is as firsthand as you can get. So, I'm happy with how that costume turned out."

At one point, Kora shows off her diplomatic chops by speaking to King Levitica in his native tongue. This language was one of several created for the films by linguist Christine Schreyer, PhD, who incorporated into it sounds and syntax known to Sofia Boutella. Thus, you'll hear French consonants, Algerian Arabic vowels, as well as Arabic sentence structure (if you were to translate it). Dialect coach Francie Brown helped Boutella and Amendola get up to speed on the finer points of verbal communication on Sharaan before their meeting.

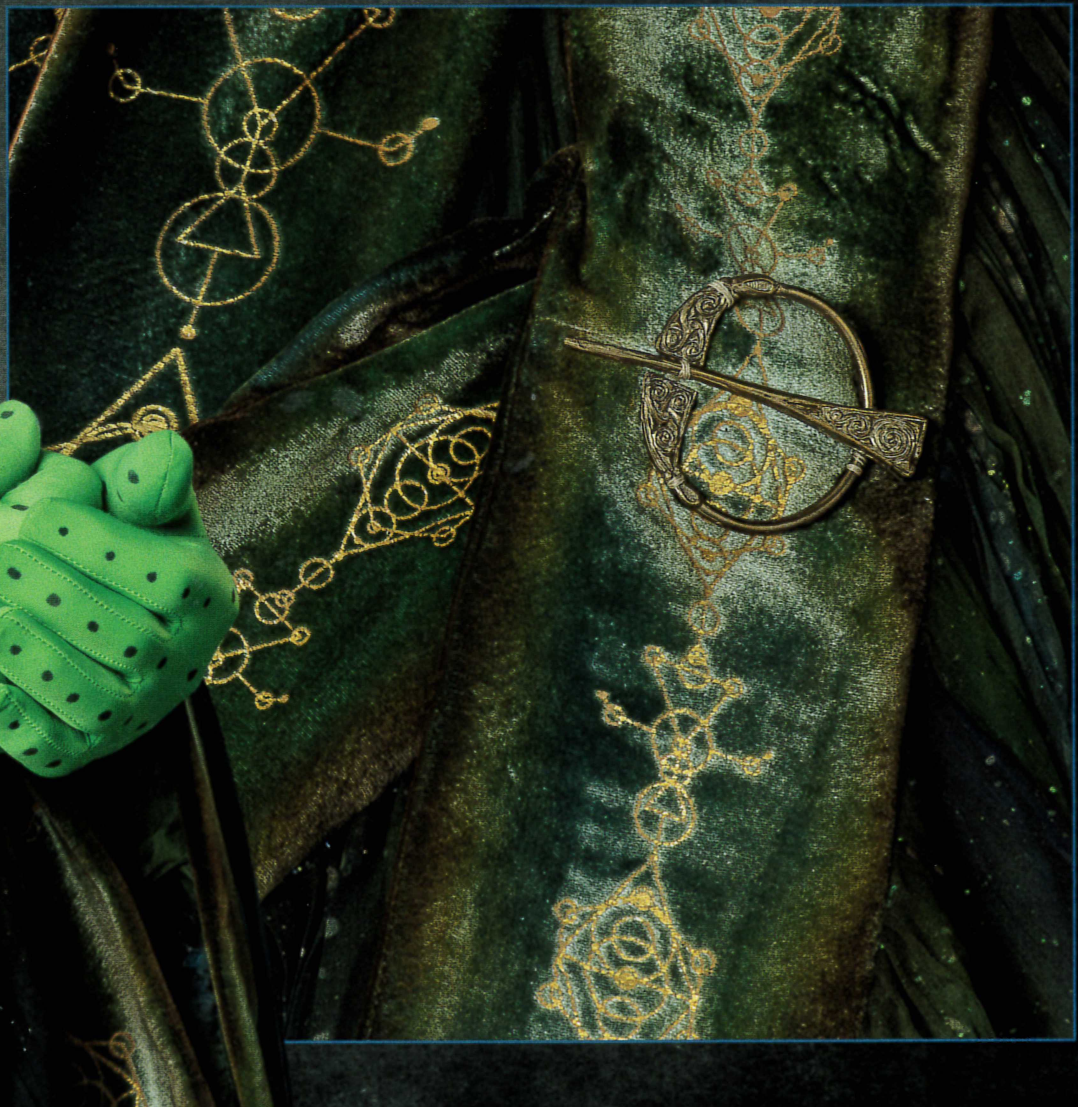




▲▶ Concepts for King Levitica.



◀ Tony Amendola all dotted up to capture his facial performance.



HEROES

ARIS

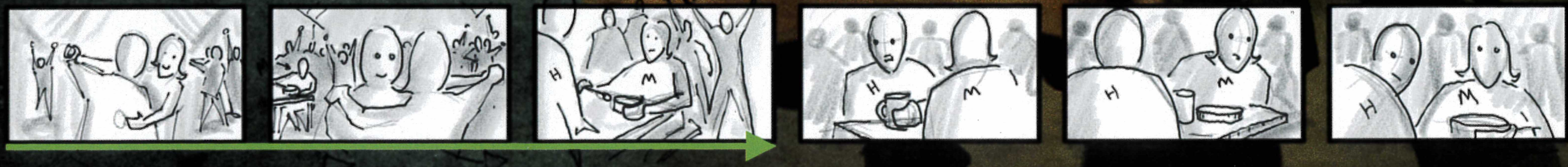
IT'S IMMEDIATELY OBVIOUS that Private Aris is not like the other Motherworld soldiers sent to occupy the village of Veldt. He's quiet, respectful, and even stands up for Jimmy when the robot is bullied. What sets him apart from his fellow soldiers is that he originally comes from royalty on the planet Toa, and is now made to serve those who crushed his world. "When Noble arrives and destroys Toa in search of the Bloodaxes, Aris ends up becoming a child soldier, where he spends some time effectively being forced to do the same to other worlds. He's been desensitized to violence, and he's been very alone and isolated for a long time, working with a particularly brutal and horrible band of the Motherworld. It's his loss of innocence, it's his loss of his youth. His whole journey is then trying to reclaim that in some way," says Sky Yang (*Tomb Raider*, *Halo*), who plays the prince-turned-infantryman.

His experiences in Veldt, and especially his time spent with Sam, are big parts

of that journey back to self-acceptance. "Sam's kindness allows him to find his humanity again. Once the other soldiers have left, he and Sam develop a relationship and it's quite healing and cathartic for him. It's Sam's acceptance that allows him to choose another side, a better side," Snyder explains. Yang is quick to add that the violence Aris has witnessed, and has been forced to inflict himself, has left him feeling he has a lot to atone for. "I think he feels the immense burden of guilt, and when he sees Sam and sees the village—Sam gives Aris all of this openness and honesty and naivety, and it takes him to a different place. Something in him is triggered, and he ends up making the decision to defect. He takes it upon himself to do

◄ Aris tries to protect Sam.

▼► Aris and Sam make a connection.



everything he can to try and protect this village, and bring order to chaos, and never let that happen to another world again," Yang says.

While filming was underway, Yang felt a tenuous but personal connection to what Aris was going through. "I live in London, and so coming over to LA, it was a very isolating experience," Yang relates, "not necessarily in a bad way, just in a way that was very different to what I was used to. Every pillar of my life changed all in one go. It was interesting to see how that started to feed into what the character was experiencing as well. He has his home, and the Motherworld comes and takes everything away from him. It was really interesting to explore what that looks like from a reality perspective." He points out that he did form deep bonds with his cast and crew mates, who are a lot friendlier than the troops of the Motherworld!

Another way Yang built an intimate connection with his character was by bringing a portion of his family history into Aris's world, literally. "My dad is Chinese, and my great-grandfather was from a small town called Biho. It's in the middle of nowhere in these mountains," he relates. "I found these accounts of kids going to school [there] and the community gathering under a giant banyan tree, so with the incredible costume department, we took that idea and expanded on it. Aris has this beautiful, beautiful piece of jewelry—a bracelet that he carries with him throughout the whole film—and there are these banyan seeds on it that will always tie him back to Toa, where he originally came from. Then the props department got involved, and they created this banyan tree symbol, and it's on all the guns and all the relics, the beautiful costumes, the props in Toa. So it was special to me to see that world grow."

Aris in his Motherworld soldier uniform.

▶ Noble asks Aris to do the unthinkable.

HEROES

SAM

IN MANY WAYS, young Sam is a personification of the idyllic village of Veldt and all it represents. "She's a very kind, gentle-spirited, hardworking farm girl. She's very open, sensitive, and highly intuitive," says Charlotte Maggi (*MaveriX*), who portrays Sam. "She's seen in our community as a confidante on the one hand, but also is a source of strength and balance, as she's wise way beyond her years. That being said, despite her calm exterior, she definitely has this real inner strength, a grit. She's a fighter. So, I like to think of the character of Sam as *Rebel Moon*'s quiet storm."

Sam's open mind draws her to engage with a couple of the newcomers from off-world, and that contact ultimately changes them all. "She's grown up in Veldt her entire life, and that's all she has known. So, when she meets Jimmy, it's refreshing for her. I think the reason that my character gets so involved with and attached to Jimmy is that she has that inquisitive nature and Jimmy is someone who's so foreign to what she's used to," Maggi explains. "The same with Aris. I think Sam's lack of judgment because of Aris's past really allows her to connect to him, in that she wants to understand him and give him strength with all he's struggled with in his life. For Aris, this is the first time he really feels like he can connect with another person, since his childhood. Sam is that innocence that Aris really wants to experience all over again."

◀▶ Charlotte Maggi embodies the peaceful, warmhearted soul of Sam.

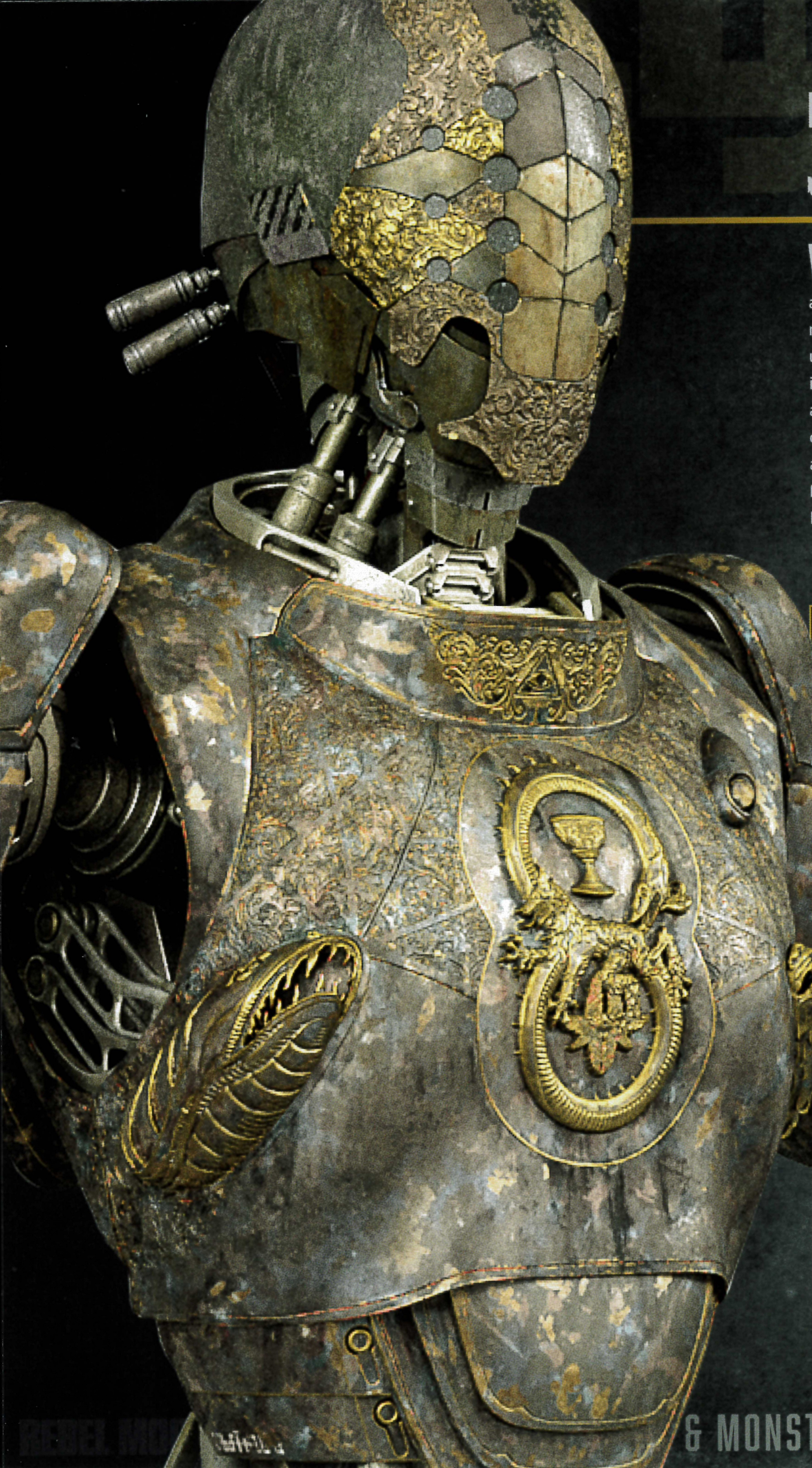
▼ Motherworld soldiers try to shatter Sam's innocence.

As much as she treasures the quiet moments Sam spends with Jimmy and Aris, Maggi appreciates variety. The intense scene where the Motherworld soldiers drag Sam into the granary and Kora makes the snap decision to save her was perhaps the actor's favorite of the shoot. "Why I liked it so much was because I feel like, for Sam, a lot of the time she's balanced in every scene. She's very neutral and calm. This was the first time where I was able to scream my heart out," she explains. "The thing I liked about it the most was that you could feel the tension in the room, just because of the set and everything put together: lighting, camera, sound, stunts. So, for me, I didn't really have to act—it felt like it was actually happening. It feels truthful."

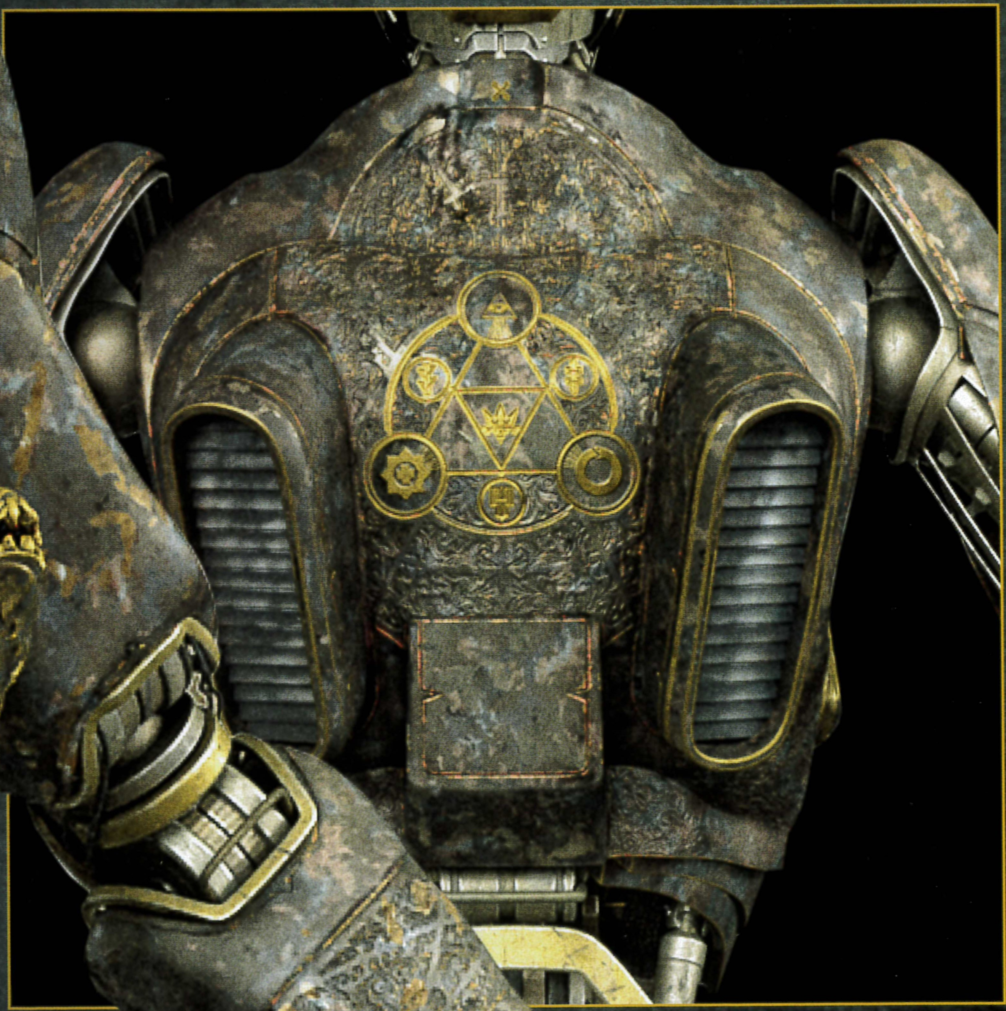
Like Sam, the Perth, Australia native opened herself up to new people and experiences when she said yes to the part a mere two weeks after graduating high school. She even put college on hold. "Living in America has been such a culture shock in a good way, because I feel like everyone's very driven in America. That's something that really motivates me and keeps me on my toes and drives me to constantly be honing my craft," Maggi says. "I love the passion there is for movies here. It's been an incredible experience and change for me to be working here at such a young age."

▶ Sam fights in the Battle of Veldt.

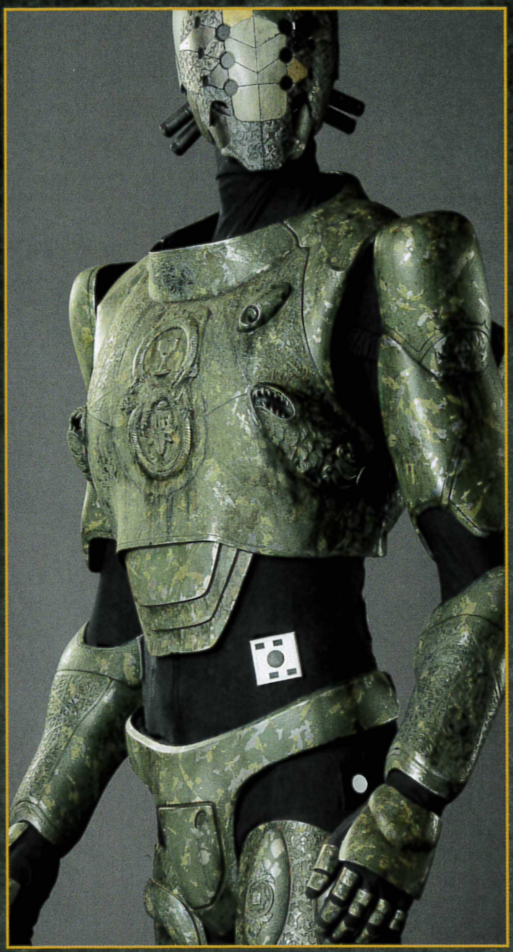
JIMMY

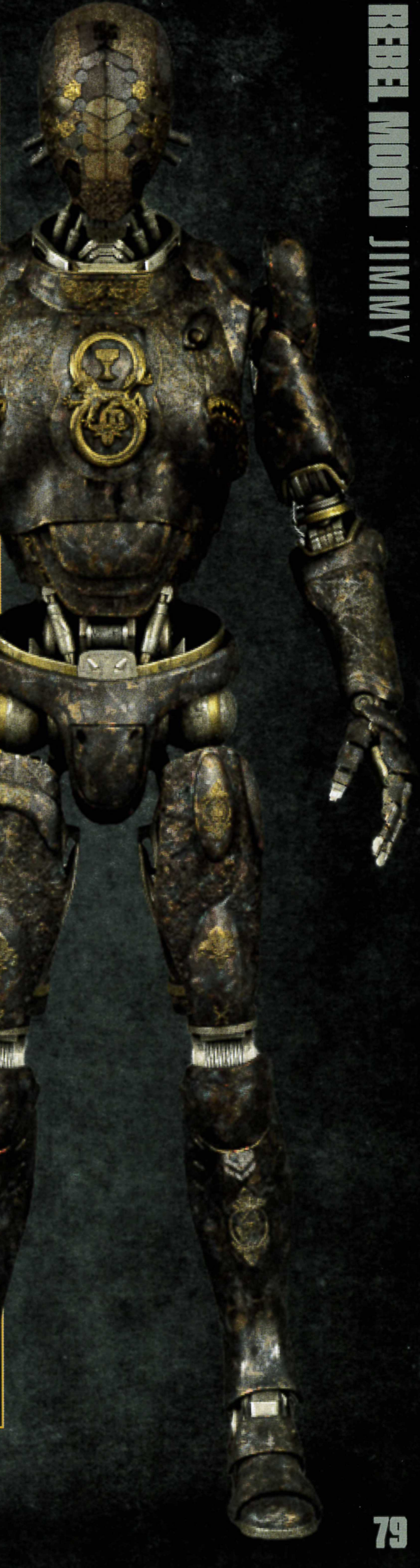


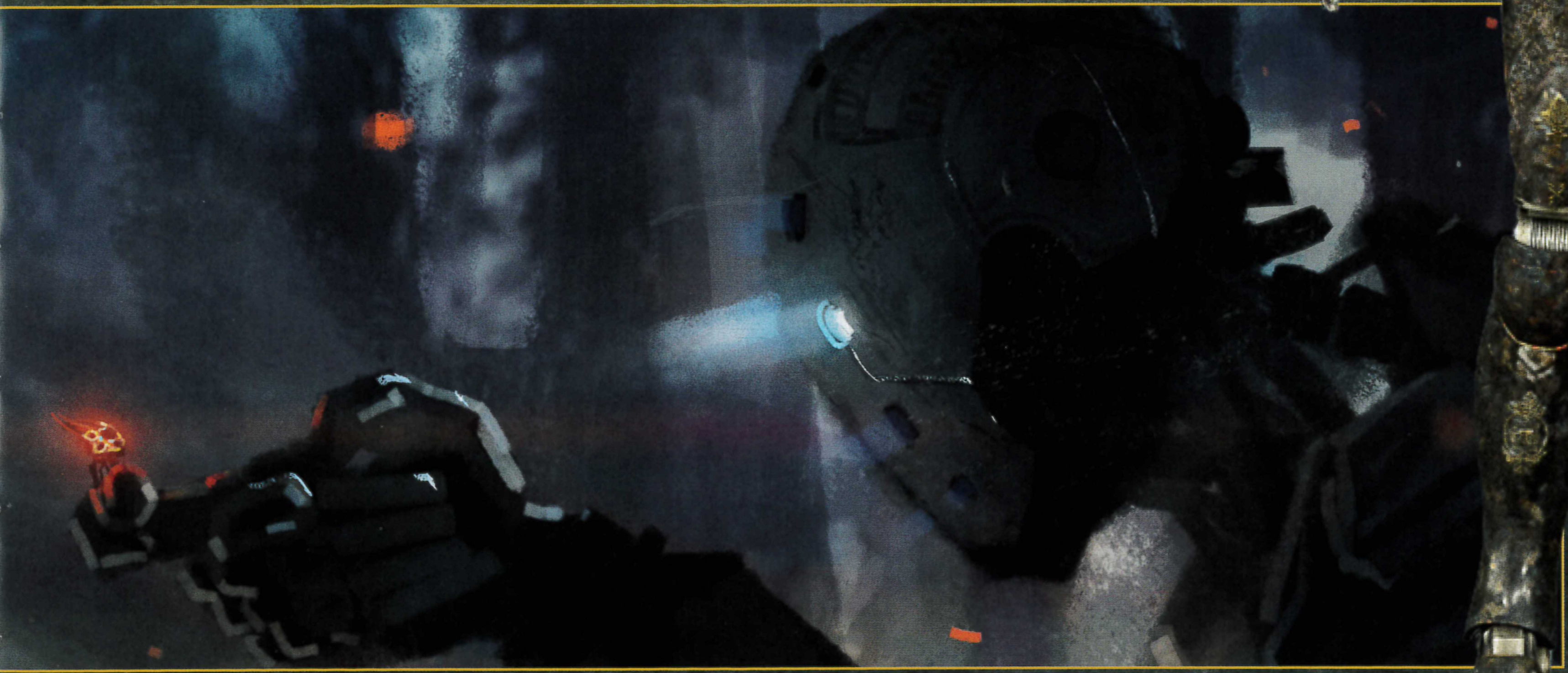
WHEN NOBLE SENDS A GROUND FORCE to occupy Veldt in his absence, an unusual soldier accompanies them: a Jimmy. First created by artisans hundreds of years before, the combat robots of the Mechanicas Militarum had served the King on countless battlefields with unswerving devotion—which proved to be their downfall. "Whoever built the Jimmys had built into them this crazy loyalty to the royal family, not realizing that when the royal family was assassinated, the result would be that this entire generation of robots would be unable to continue, because they had no purpose. The Jimmys lost their desire to fight. They become almost like conscientious objectors," Snyder explains. "Our Jimmy now works as kind of a forklift and/or a piece of military hardware like a jeep. He just moves gear around for them. He might cook... Then he has quite an awakening over the course of the movie."



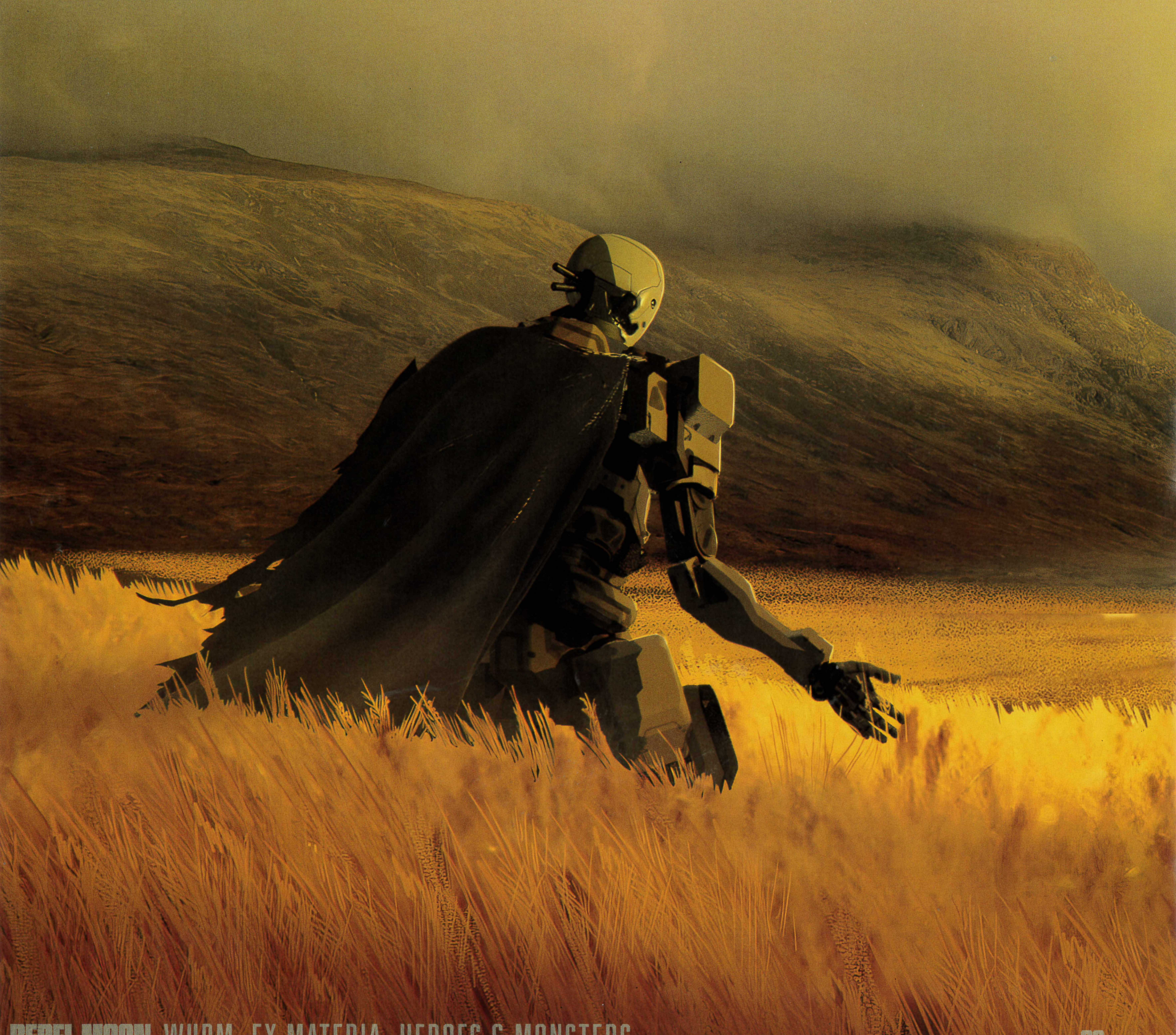
◀▶ Details and weathering on the ancient robot.

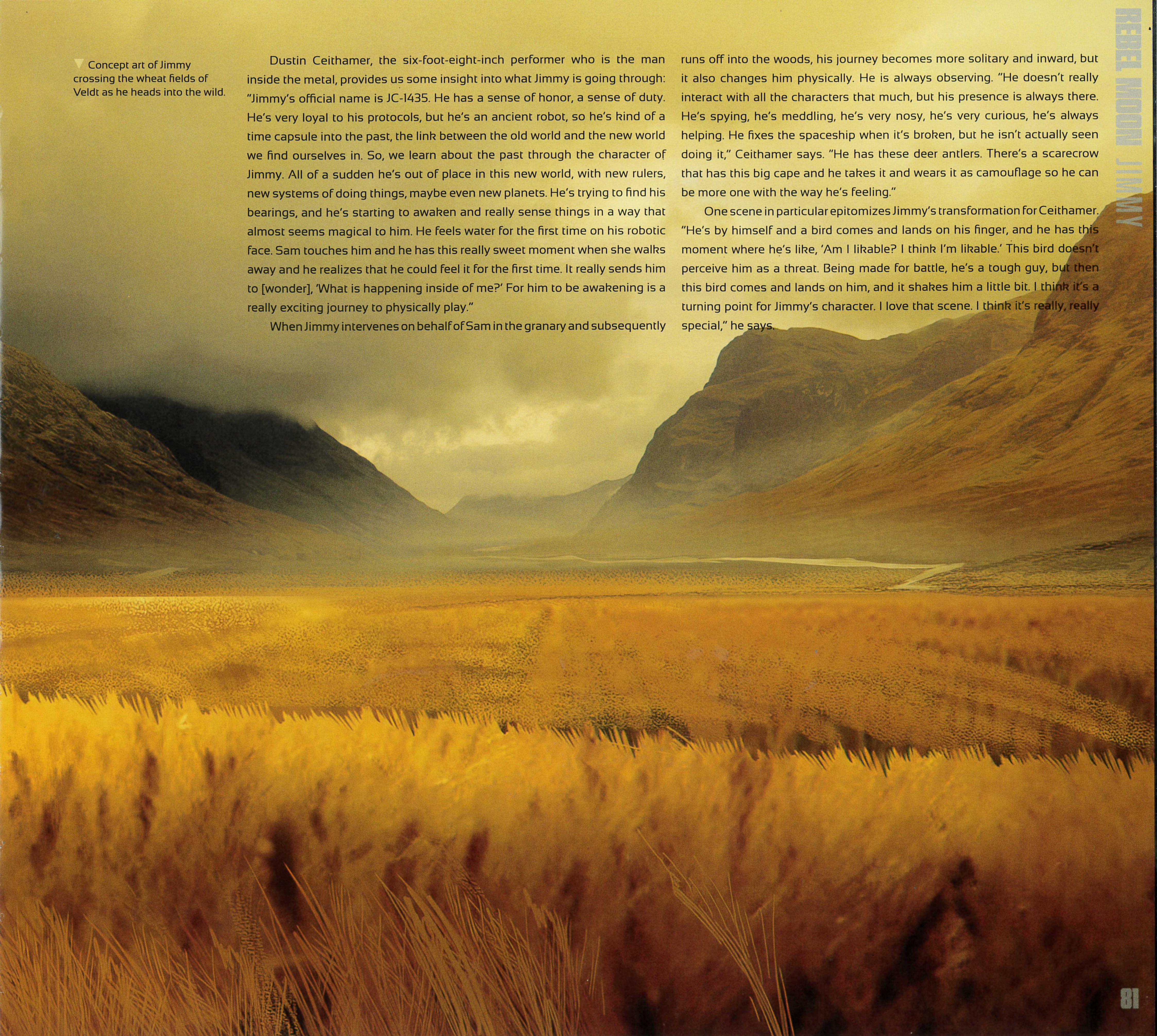






▲ Jimmy connects to the natural world in unexpected ways.





▼ Concept art of Jimmy crossing the wheat fields of Veldt as he heads into the wild.

Dustin Ceithamer, the six-foot-eight-inch performer who is the man inside the metal, provides us some insight into what Jimmy is going through: "Jimmy's official name is JC-1435. He has a sense of honor, a sense of duty. He's very loyal to his protocols, but he's an ancient robot, so he's kind of a time capsule into the past, the link between the old world and the new world we find ourselves in. So, we learn about the past through the character of Jimmy. All of a sudden he's out of place in this new world, with new rulers, new systems of doing things, maybe even new planets. He's trying to find his bearings, and he's starting to awaken and really sense things in a way that almost seems magical to him. He feels water for the first time on his robotic face. Sam touches him and he has this really sweet moment when she walks away and he realizes that he could feel it for the first time. It really sends him to [wonder], 'What is happening inside of me?' For him to be awakening is a really exciting journey to physically play."

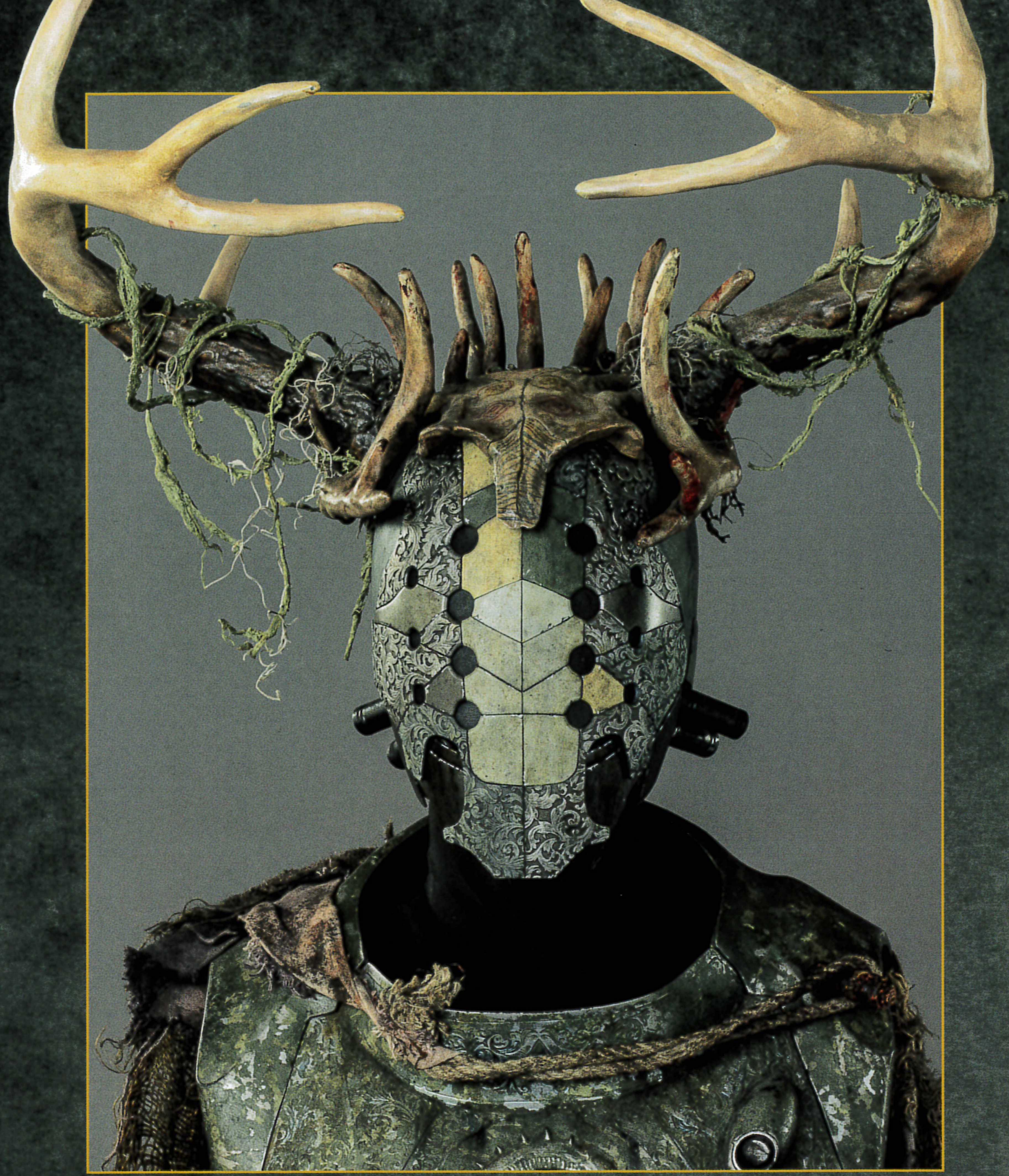
When Jimmy intervenes on behalf of Sam in the granary and subsequently runs off into the woods, his journey becomes more solitary and inward, but it also changes him physically. He is always observing. "He doesn't really interact with all the characters that much, but his presence is always there. He's spying, he's meddling, he's very nosy, he's very curious, he's always helping. He fixes the spaceship when it's broken, but he isn't actually seen doing it," Ceithamer says. "He has these deer antlers. There's a scarecrow that has this big cape and he takes it and wears it as camouflage so he can be more one with the way he's feeling."

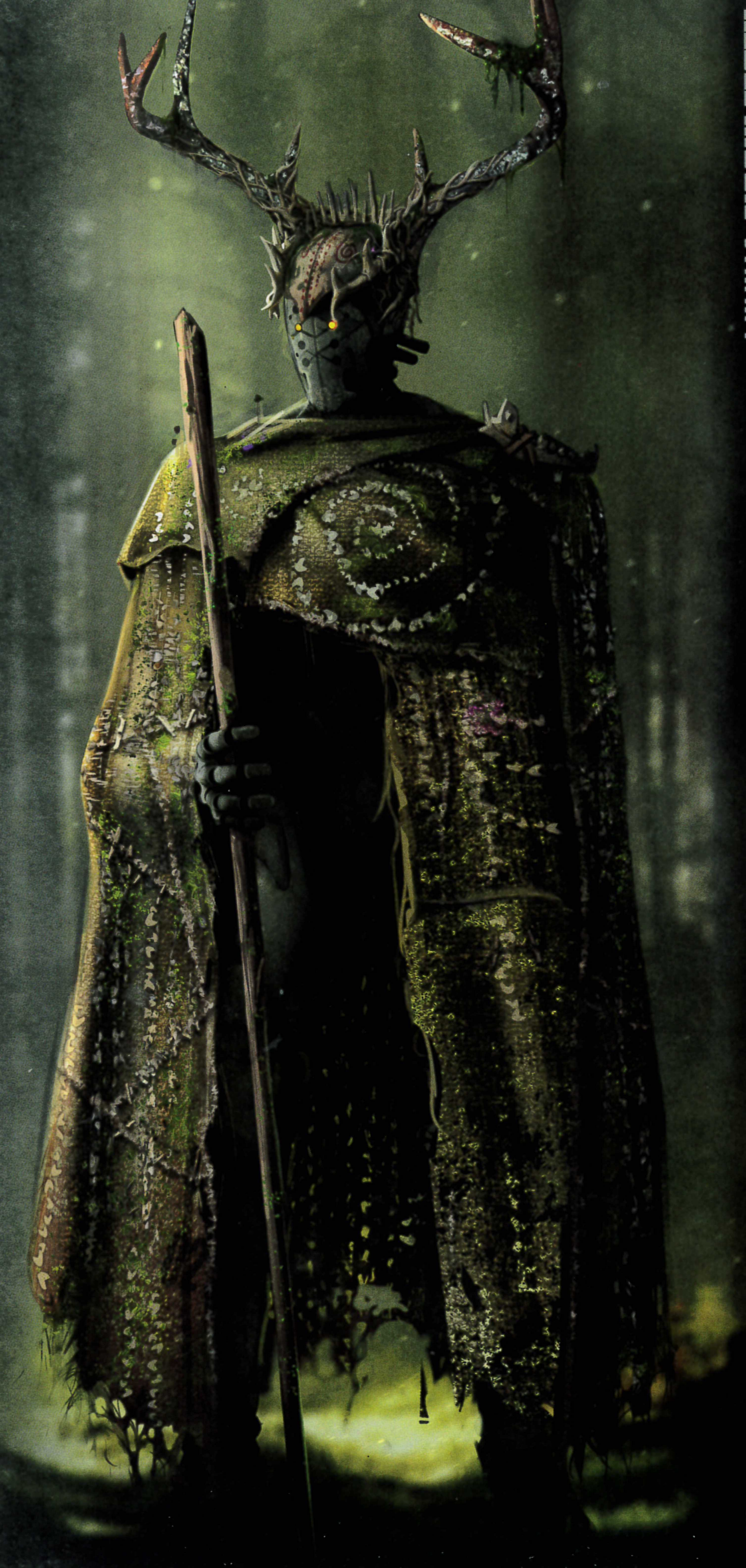
One scene in particular epitomizes Jimmy's transformation for Ceithamer. "He's by himself and a bird comes and lands on his finger, and he has this moment where he's like, 'Am I likable? I think I'm likable.' This bird doesn't perceive him as a threat. Being made for battle, he's a tough guy, but then this bird comes and lands on him, and it shakes him a little bit. I think it's a turning point for Jimmy's character. I love that scene. I think it's really, really special," he says.

During Jimmy's awakening he takes on the trappings of a mythological figure.

"Jimmy's kind of a unique character, because there are so many artistic teams bringing him together," Ceithamer explains. "There's Sir Anthony Hopkins playing his voice, I'm playing his body. There's a costume team that has built a physical costume, and there's CGI effects. So it really is a collaboration to bring Jimmy to life." He adds, "When I found out Sir Anthony was going to be the voice of Jimmy, I was on sensory overload. You can't get bigger than Sir Anthony Hopkins! Just listening to [his] voice is going to make you stand in a certain way. You're not going to slouch and sound like Sir Anthony Hopkins."

Doing justice to that voice acting through movement, while at the same time conveying complex emotions from behind a mask, was a challenging but rewarding job for Ceithamer. "Being a creature actor is a really interesting niche in the entertainment field, because there's a lot of homework and things that are put into each character that maybe the



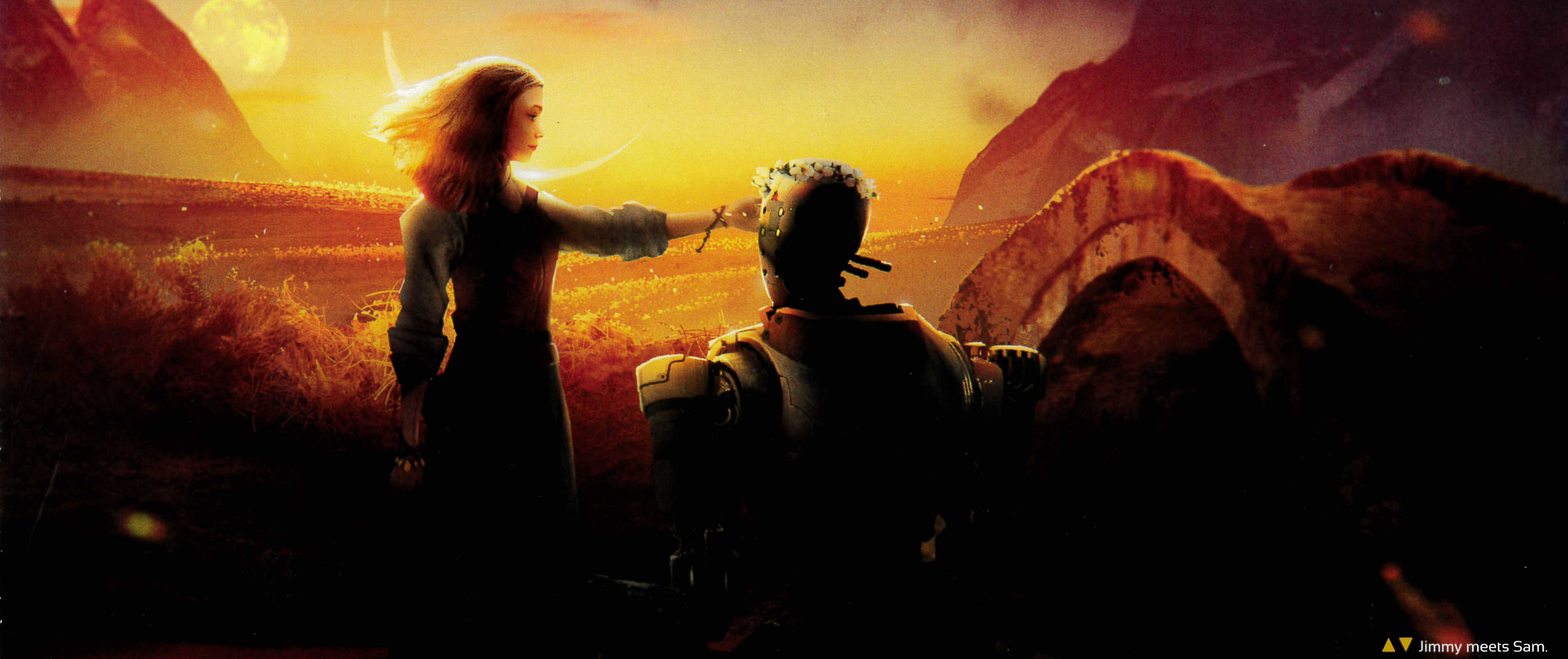


audience will never see. You have a responsibility to communicate a story, so you really have to think, 'How can I communicate fear, wonder, these kind of elusive qualities and characteristics without the face?'" he says. "Zack and I have definitely been finding the movement of Jimmy as we've been going. A lot of his posture and movements are going to be from a martial-arts standpoint. There's a lot of broadness in his movement. He's always ready to attack, because he was programmed for battle."

Supporting Hopkins' and Ceithamer's performance was a sophisticated costume blending the practical and the fantastic. The final onscreen result is a combination of 3D-printed armor pieces (appropriately aged for an ancient robot), accessories from the wardrobe department, and VFX wizardry. "At the very base of the Jimmy costume on set is a blue suit, and then on top of that goes a physical armor. He has eight receptors on his face that light up and can communicate differently if he's in danger, or if he's inquisitive, or if he's just taking the world in. All the blue parts are going to be CGI'd to become more robotic, and be joints and gadgets and gizmos. The design is so cool. The first time I saw it, I was like, 'I'm

◀▶ Quiet moments on Jimmy's journey.

▼ Dustin Ceithamer, happy in his work.

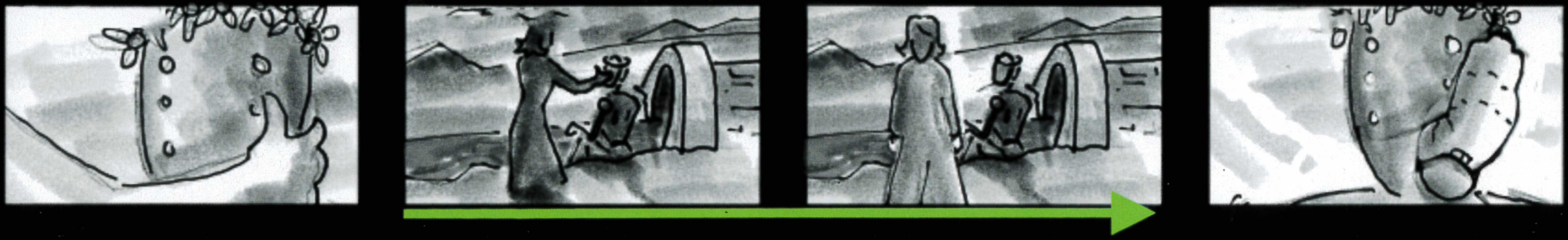


▲▼ Jimmy meets Sam.

the luckiest tall boy in the world!'" says Ceithamer.

"The use of part-lines and cover-plates was key to the overall look, as we wanted the ability to show how the Jimmy class could be modified and updated when necessary," explains production designer Stephen Swain. "In terms of the breastplate enrichment, I was looking at Maximilian armor [German plate armor worn c.1520], and wanted to use Motherworld motifs that had been developed. Equally, I wanted to ensure that Jimmy's palms had a softer quality to them. Looking at high-end bespoke car manufacturing, we were thinking about how leather could be used to create a more tactile surface, something that could be beautifully stitched and would show a wonderful sense of wear and patina."

Without boasting, Ceithamer is sure audiences will find Jimmy incredibly relatable. "Jimmy is such a likable character, because he's learning along with the audience. He is experiencing this world for the first time, but also he represents hope for a world he's not in. That's a universal theme, that we feel sometimes that we're other or we're outsiders. He's programmed for a world he's not living in, and as he finds hope and how to live in a new world, that's what we have to do as humans. We're constantly learning and relearning how to fit into a world that sometimes we don't feel was built for us," he says.



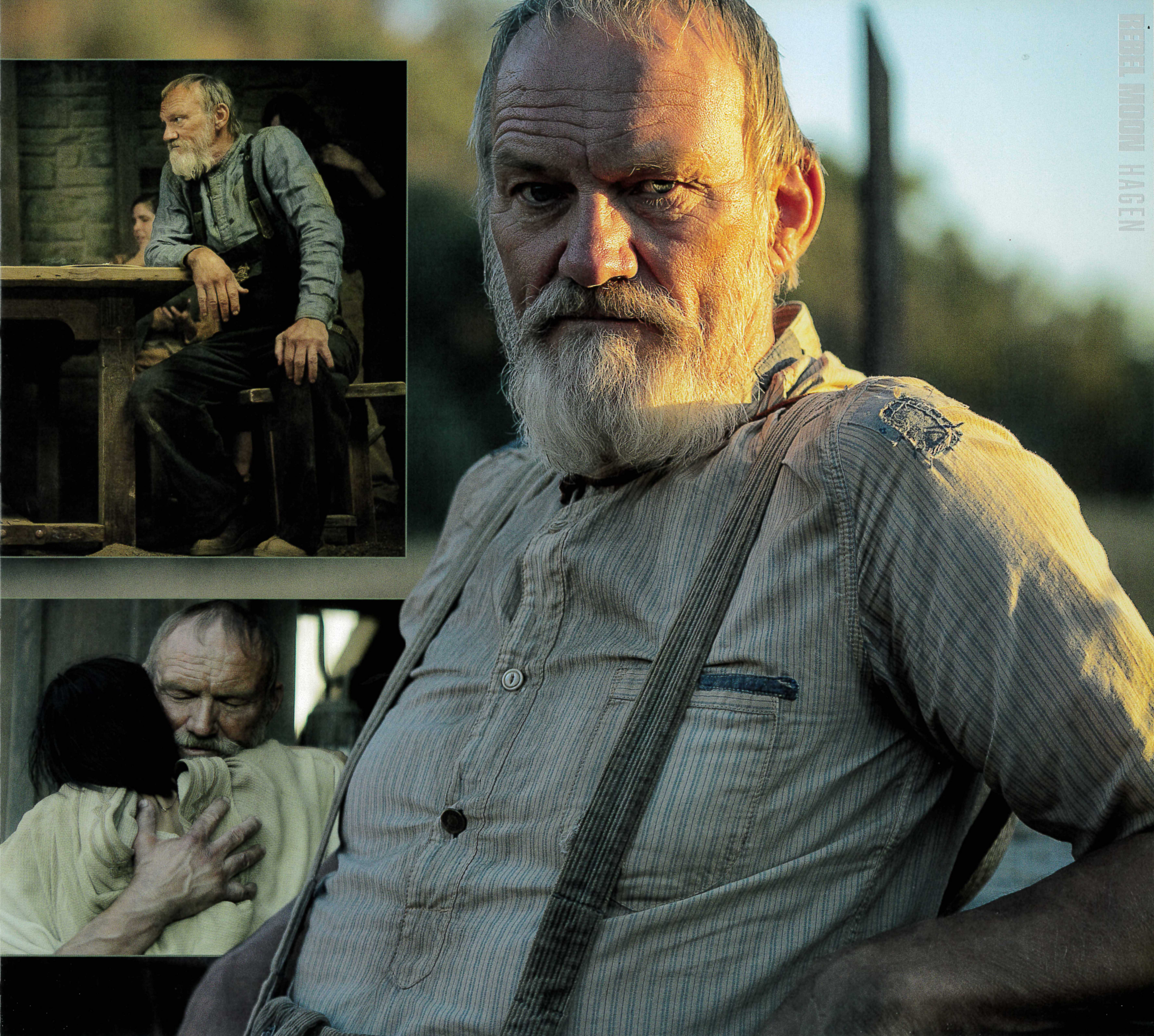
HEROES
HAGEN

WHEN KORA'S DROPSHIP CRASHED on Veldt, it was Hagen who pulled her from the wreckage and nursed her back to health. Her only true confidant in the village, on the rare occasions the even-keeled Hagen shows any frustration at all with Kora, it's because of her seeming inability to commit fully to integrating into the community.

This is the second time acting in a Snyder film for Icelander Ingvar Sigurdsson (*Zack Snyder's Justice League*, *The Northman*). He recalls, "I only worked with him for one or two days, but it was so good to be around him, and I could feel a lot of trust. Coming back here, meeting him again, it was the same feeling. Down to earth, and everything looks so easy, but of course he's a hardworking guy, but it's so effortless, the way he directs you without you having a feeling that you are being directed." Not only was Sigurdsson happy to be working with Snyder again, but he was also pleasantly surprised by his role. "Usually, when I play in foreign movies, I play baddies, but when I read this one, I was, 'Wow, he's such a nice guy!' I was really impressed," he says.

Sigurdsson sees that nice guy's role in Veldt Village as being "to gather people together and give them a boost when everything looks impossible. He's kind of a spiritual leader. I have a feeling that he's the man people can come to and get some advice. My character is very optimistic, and even though everything seems down, he is still trying to figure out how we can survive." That optimism leads him to offer some advice that, at first, is derided as naive. "He comes up to Kora, Sofia's character, with an idea because he finds her giving up and trying to run away. But Hagen comes in with an idea to try and stand and fight. Not only us, but with some others' help. He clearly doesn't want to give up," he says. Kora only begins to see how right he is after the fight in the granary.

▲▶ Hagen can always be counted on to give advice and support where needed.



HEROES

DEN

ANOTHER VILLAGER on friendly terms with Kora is Den, the community's foremost hunter. It's Den whom she chooses to spend the night with after Gunnar is too shy to make his move. And although Den doesn't accompany Kora on her interstellar quest for heroes, he steps up and proves himself one by defending Veldt from Noble's attack in the final battle.

Stuart Martin (*Army of Thieves*, *Miss Scarlet & the Duke*) plays the confident huntsman, and found a motivation for his character, and for all the Veldtians, while doing some research on Scandinavian culture for the role. "*Hygge*—it's a Danish word—it's this word that means warmth, comfort," he explains. "It's that feeling when you light a candle or when you put a fire on. It's about peace. It's about putting a jumper on and sitting on your little Veldtian veranda and having a beer. That's what they're about. It's about life outside of work, and that's completely opposite from what the Motherworld stands for."

▼ Den stands by his community.

▲ Den is one of the leading voices in Veldt.

The staggering effort that went into creating the sets, costumes, and props left a lasting impression on Martin. "Daily I have been overwhelmed," he says. "With Den being the hunter, he's got this great knife, this big hunting knife, which is basically attached to the leg, so it's there, ready to use. His hunting rifle, that has been crafted and made by Brad [Elliott] and the props team, who are incredible. He came to me with a piece of foam on cardboard with a beautiful design on it. I tried that for sizing, and he went away and did some tweaks. A couple of days later, a different sizing to see how it fit, and then it was sent off to Weta, and they came back two months later with this amazing hunting rifle that has so much history to it. It informs us, and it informs the world of the story of where this rifle's come from, and how it's been passed down. It's an amazing piece."

Martin has been a fan of Zack Snyder since he was a teenager in Glasgow, and jumped at the chance to work with him. "Zack is my filmic hero," he says. "His directorial style is right up my street. There is so much prep work, there is so much planning. Then you step on as the actor and you just go with it. You feel like you're doing guerrilla filmmaking, some small film, but on this massive scale. He's an actor's director, but he's such a visual, massive, epic director, too."

HEROES

SINDRI

COREY STOLL (*House of Cards*, *Billions*) plays the jovial, lusty leader of Veldt, and recalls how he got the role. "I got a call to voice a character in [Snyder's] Norse mythology animated series [*Twilight of the Gods*], and it was supposed to be this Scandinavian accent," Stoll says. "I quickly Googled 'Scandinavian accents' and came up with some sort of approximation, and Zack seemed to love it. It was a really, really fun recording session—really bold, violent, over-the-top sort of action. Then he called me that night and we talked about working together again."

Stoll had no problem changing gears and getting a handle on the peaceful village that would be his new home, as well as his place in it. "Life is good in Veldt. Here we are on this agricultural planet. We have a few touches of technology, but it's pretty much like medieval agrarian society. Very isolated. We grow enough to feed ourselves, and there's a tight community with a sense of culture," he says. Stoll wove this sense of place into his portrayal of Sindri. "He's a good leader. He really wants what's best for his community. He doesn't have much experience with conflict, even though he is a big, sort of fearsome-looking guy. He is just seeking a peaceful, simple life for his people."

A great example of what Sindri's leadership has wrought can be seen in the festive gathering at the longhouse at the beginning of the first film. "We see the people of Veldt at their absolute happiest, at the height," Stoll says. "They've survived the really harsh winters here. They've tilled the fields and they're seeding them, and they're preparing for the harvest, and it's really as good as it gets. They're singing and dancing." All the prep that went into that scene helped make it feel special and genuine. "This set is incredible, and they've got this great group of actors and background people to fill out that world," he says. The brutal murder of Sindri and his wife at the hands of Noble, however, brings an abrupt end to that sense of peace and security for the people of Veldt.

◀▶ Sindri (Corey Stoll) led Veldt with a steady hand until Noble arrived.

ELJUN

WHEN KORA ARRIVES with her band in tow, many of the Veldtians are unsure how to receive these so-called heroes. Are they to be their deliverers or their doom? At least one is fascinated enough to approach, a brave boy named Eljun. Played by Caden Dragomer (*Sweet Tooth*), Eljun is especially in awe of Nemesis, and he forms a close bond with her that carries through to the final battle.

▼▶ Eljun tries to get Nemesis's attention, and readies for a fight.

THEMES

THE HARVEST

WHEN THEY LEARN that *The King's Gaze* is set to arrive in five days, that hope leads Kora's group to use everything at their disposal to defend their new home, including the wheat currently in the fields. By stockpiling the grain, they reason, they can forestall an indiscriminate bombardment by the hungry crew of the dreadnought. In a show that they have embraced village life, Kora and her band, including a general and a prince, join in bringing in the harvest.

As producer Deborah Snyder says, "Wheat is a character in our film," and of course, plastic or CG wheat would simply not do in a Zack Snyder film. The production planted three separate fields to provide live, growing wheat for the film, with one of those right across the artificial river from the Veldt village built at the Blue Cloud Movie Ranch in Santa Clarita, California. With instruction from Jacob Pressey, who runs a small brewery and a regenerative beer farm in Humboldt County, the cast quickly picked up the techniques for processing the ripe grain the old-school way. "We did some scythe training, so they practiced actually chopping down the wheat. We also did the bundling of the sheaves. We did threshing, separating the seeds from the stock, and then also winnowing, which is separating all the chaff from the seeds using wind," Pressey explains.

"We harvested a whole day. All the scenes, it's not fake at all. We had real scythes that had a real blade that could cut you. It's a lot of work. It was a lot of fun," says Boutella. Michiel Huisman also had a blast learning to use the old tools. "From now on, if I ever have to cut grass, I will not use a machine. I will use a scythe," he jokes. Bae teases that a new career could be in the offing: "We learned a lot about harvest. Maybe I can use it later. I can be a professional farmer." In the end, much of the grain collected fed the animals at Big Sky Movie Ranch, with some reserved for brewing a special "Veldtian Wheat Ale."

▲ Sam presents each of the heroes with banners that she has embroidered.

◀ Jimmy watches the sun rise over the wheat fields of Veldt.

▶ Titus sings.

THEMES

TITUS'S SONG

With the harvest brought in and the flour ground, the Veldtians have time for a celebratory feast before the battle preparations need to begin. There is drinking and carousing. Even stoic Nemesis dances with Eljun. Sam presents friends both new and old with banners to honor them for their service to the village. Then General Titus clears his throat and begins a song. It's an epic ballad telling the tale of a soldier far from home, dreaming of the love he left behind and the home he hopes to one day return to.

Sung by Djimon Hounsou, the song was written in the Fon language of Benin by acclaimed vocalist Lionel Loueke. The portion we are privileged to hear goes:

Dada sêgbo tché Lê
My Ancestors

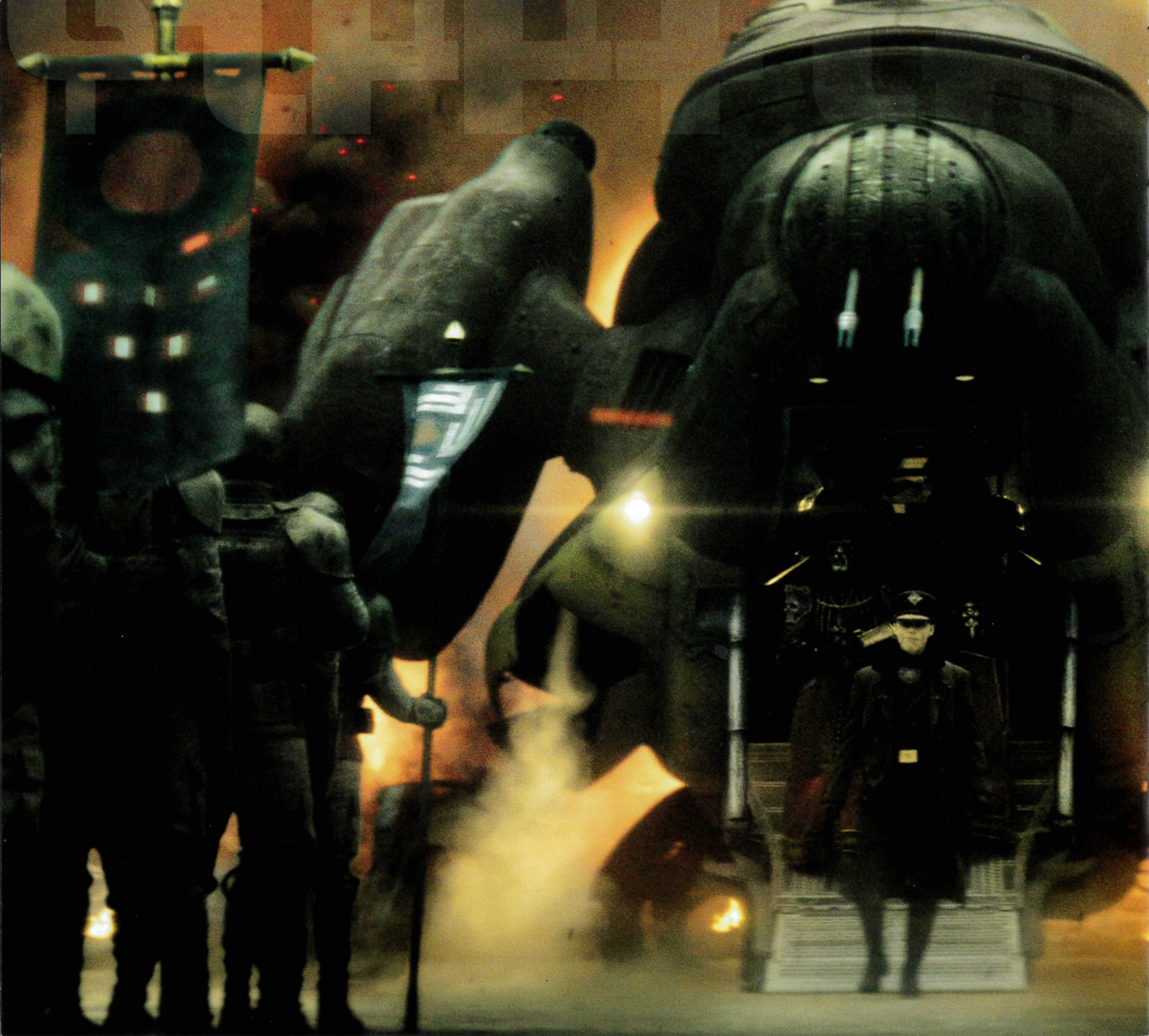
Akon kpinkpan miton
Your courage

Djihoué Yê houé Adja Nou lê ton
You God of Adja People

Maman tché
My Mother

Do atchê djitché
Bless Me

Wan gnigni toé ni wrlin mi gan.
Make your love protect us.

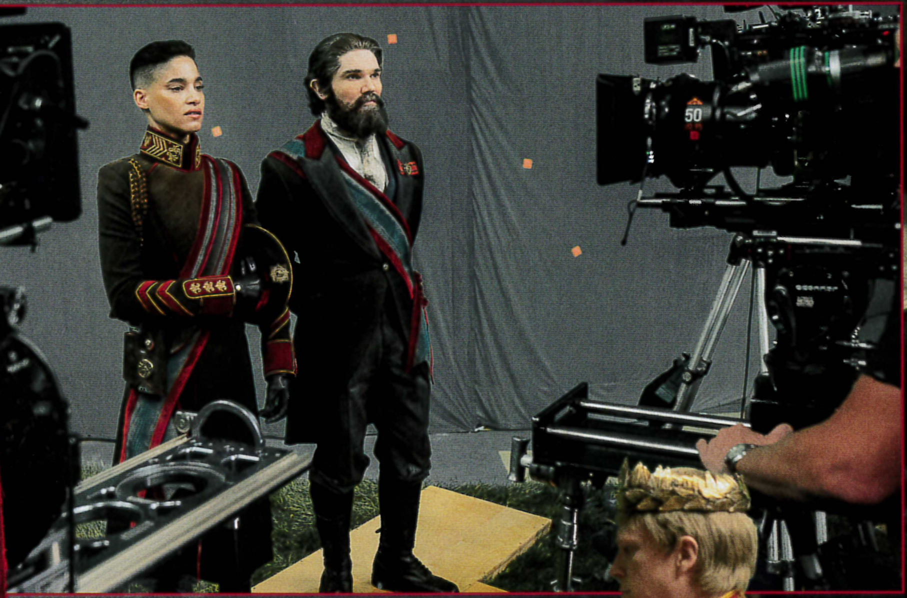


VILLAINS

VILLAINS

BALISARIUS

THE REALM HAS BEEN WITHOUT A KING for several years now, ever since the royal family was treacherously struck down in the engine room of *The King's Gaze*. But there has been a steady hand at the helm of state the whole time—Regent Balisarius—who has brought stability to the Motherworld and spread its borders ever outward. "Balisarius is in a period of expansion, you could say. Really brutal expansion," Snyder says. "He's much rougher and much more mean spirited toward the locals than, say, the King was a short time ago. So, the tone of the Motherworld has changed, from when the King was in charge and the Realm was relatively benign, to its modern incarnation, where it is a really brutal and horrible regime that is just wreaking havoc on everything they come across."



▲▲ Noble makes an entrance on Veldt.

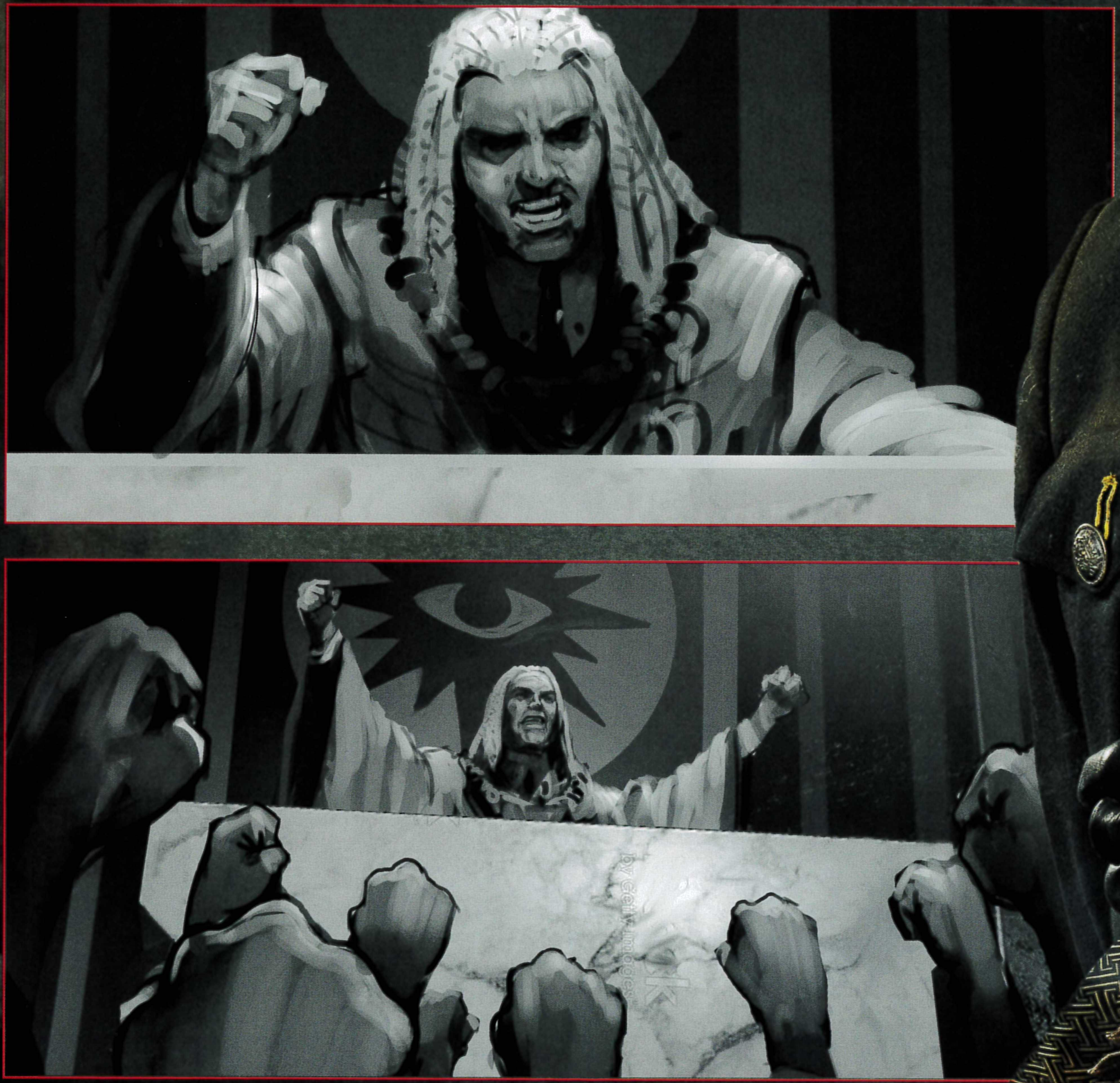
◀▶ Ambitious Balisarius climbs from loyal officer to respected senator.

Playing the role of the Regent is Fra Fee (*Les Misérables*, *Animals*), who gives us a short synopsis of Balisarius's astonishing career. "In a nutshell, Balisarius is the overarching villain of this piece," he says. "We get these flashbacks, these little snapshots of Balisarius's life. The first time we see him is when he captures Kora from her home planet. By this stage, he has managed to infiltrate into the military in the Motherworld. The next time we see him, he has worked his way up through the establishment and becomes very close to the King. We learn that he is almost adopted by the King, as I guess a son or a younger brother, but the King very much takes him under his wing even though he is clearly an outsider to the Motherworld. He infiltrates it further by becoming a huge presence in the political sphere, becoming a Senator. Ultimately, we get to the present day: He has killed the King, overthrown the monarchy, and become the Regent of this universe. Through the course of about thirty years, he's managed to get to the peak of this pyramid."

◀ Balisarius feigns outrage at the assassination of the King (Cary Elwes).

Fee, a native of Northern Ireland, took that notion of being an outsider and ran with it. "Certainly, something that I find quite interesting is that Zack encouraged me and gave me license to use my own accent in this piece, which is really cool, because I don't get to use it on screen all that much. But because this is a new idea, and the fact that Balisarius is an outsider and he has infiltrated this world, it works very well," Fee explains. "I come from a very rural place, but by the end of this movie I couldn't be dressed in a more outlandishly fancy costume, with a crown and these luscious, royal-blue colors. It's so incongruous, actually, to my own voice, but it's almost to show the absurdity of someone so far away from that world, and how he's risen to get there. People back home would find that certainly very entertaining, that a lad from Tyrone has made it good."

He also gives us some insight into how Balisarius runs things now that he's in charge. "It's not a fair world, and they certainly don't treat their citizens fairly. The way in which they maintain power, which is ultimately the most important thing to them, is through control and intimidation," he says. "Once we start to show these nuggets of information about what the Motherworld looks like, it gets very, very rigid and military-esque, and shows shades of



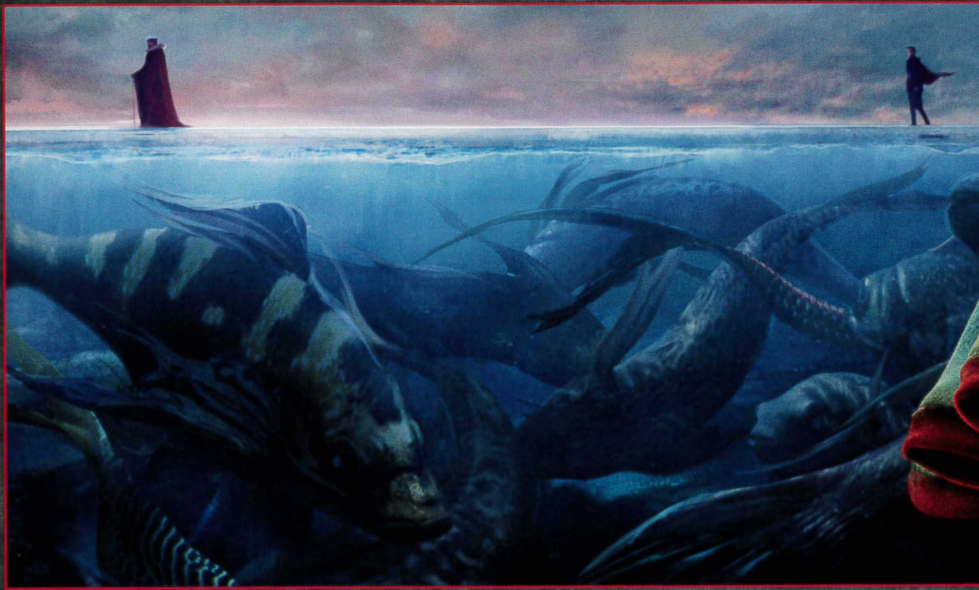
▲ Concept art for Balisarius delivering a passionate speech in the Senate.

RM22
PANAVISION

the communists and the fascists: extremely organized, and everything is in right angles. There are very clear parallels with regimes that we know, that we have studied, that we see on the news every day."

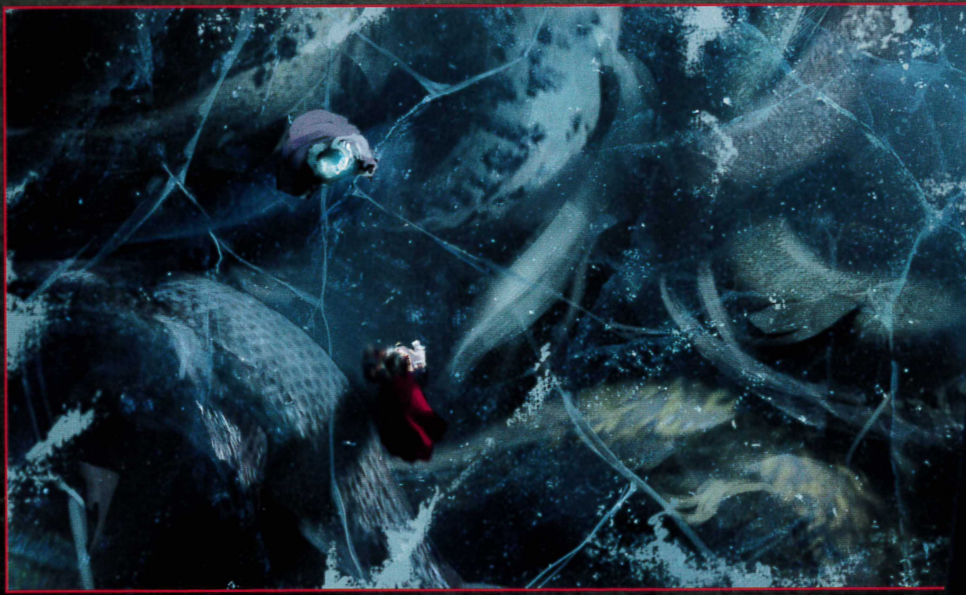
Still, being a bad guy has its upsides, like when you're able to lord it over the other major bad guy. "My very first scene to shoot was with Ed Skrein, who plays Noble. I was very glad to have that scene with Ed. I think he's brilliant," Fee says. "It was a wonderful flip for him, because he's playing the status game. He's been the highest status in every single scene that he's shot in this movie, but the moment he's with Balisarius, he's like, 'Uh-huh, no, I got you here.' So, that was fun for him and fun for me."

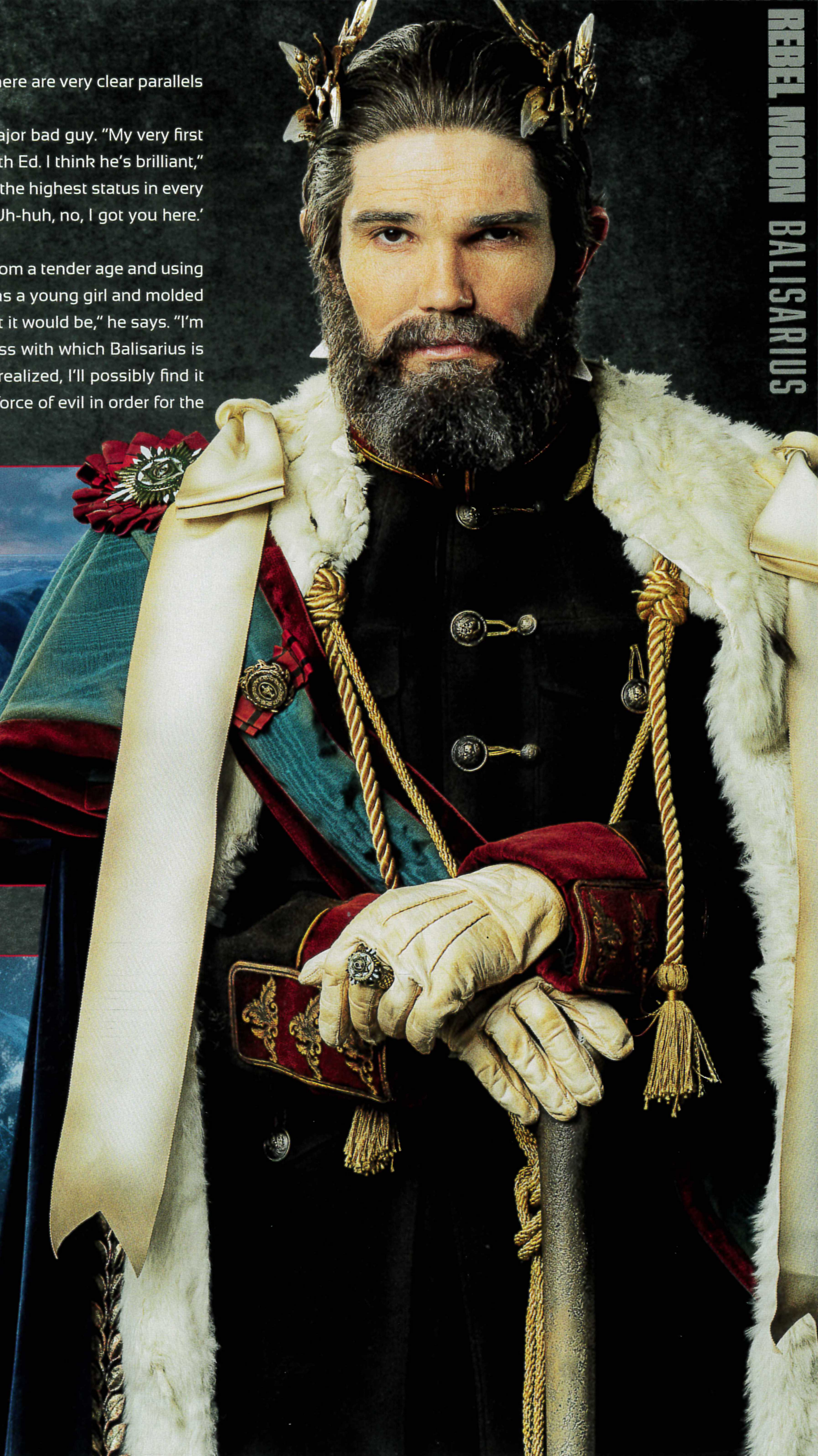
The way Balisarius has traumatized Kora, however—exposing her to horrific violence from a tender age and using her for his nefarious ends—weighs on Fee. "Our story is really devastating. I captured her as a young girl and molded her into being something that I knew would be useful one day, but I didn't even know what it would be," he says. "I'm not sure if I'm going to be able to cope seeing the full thing, to be honest. The ruthlessness with which Balisarius is able to simply eradicate an entire community, an entire planet. Whenever I see that fully realized, I'll possibly find it a bit more difficult to watch. But then, that's part of the storytelling. We need an effective force of evil in order for the good to have something to combat, something to fight for."



▶ Having seized power, Regent Balisarius is king in all but title.

▲▼▼ Concepts for Regent Balisarius communicating with Noble.



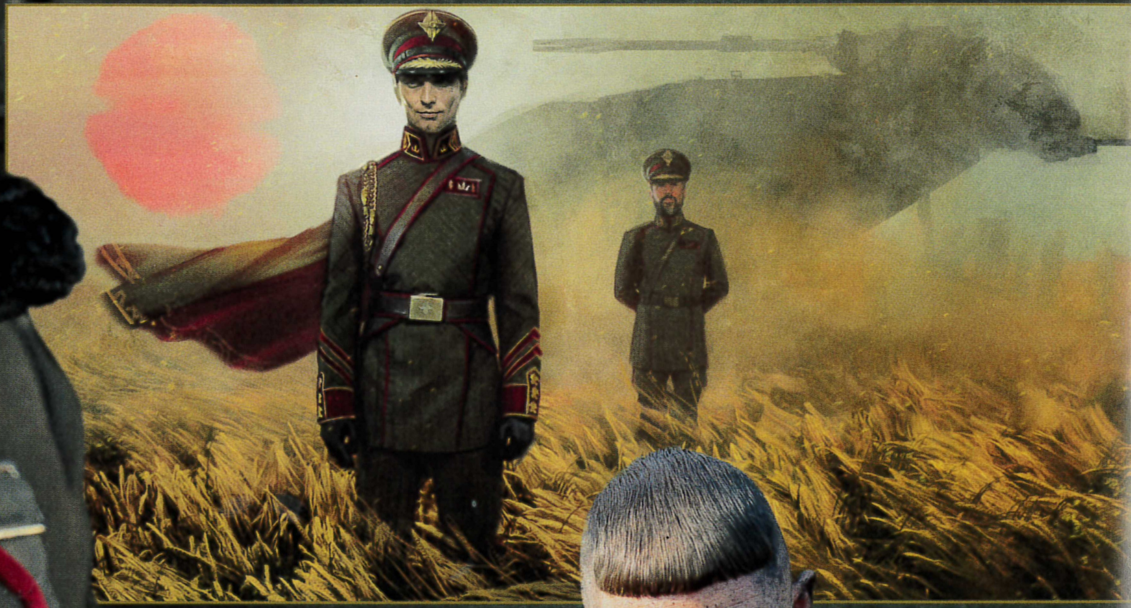


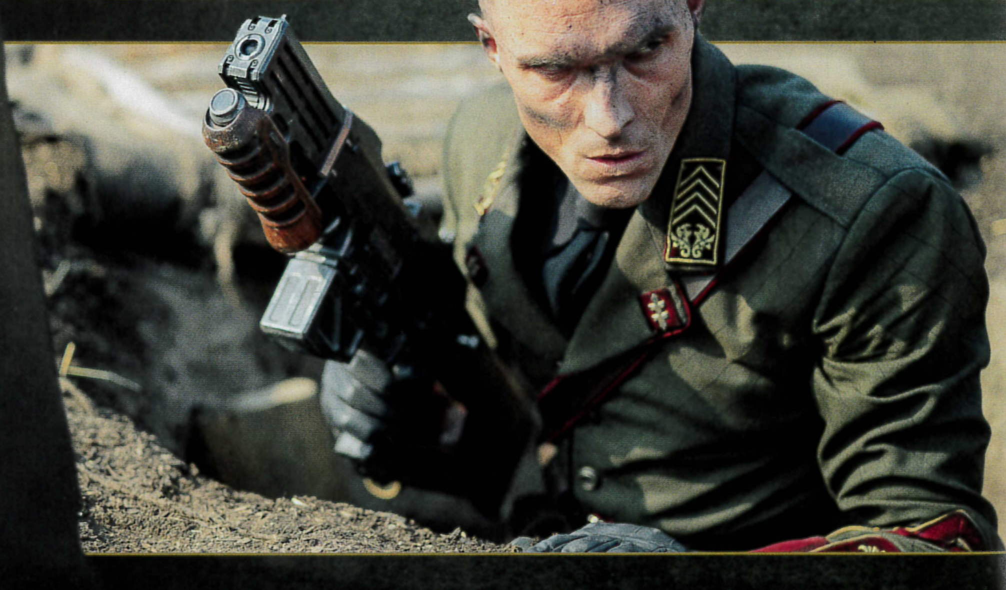
VILLAINS

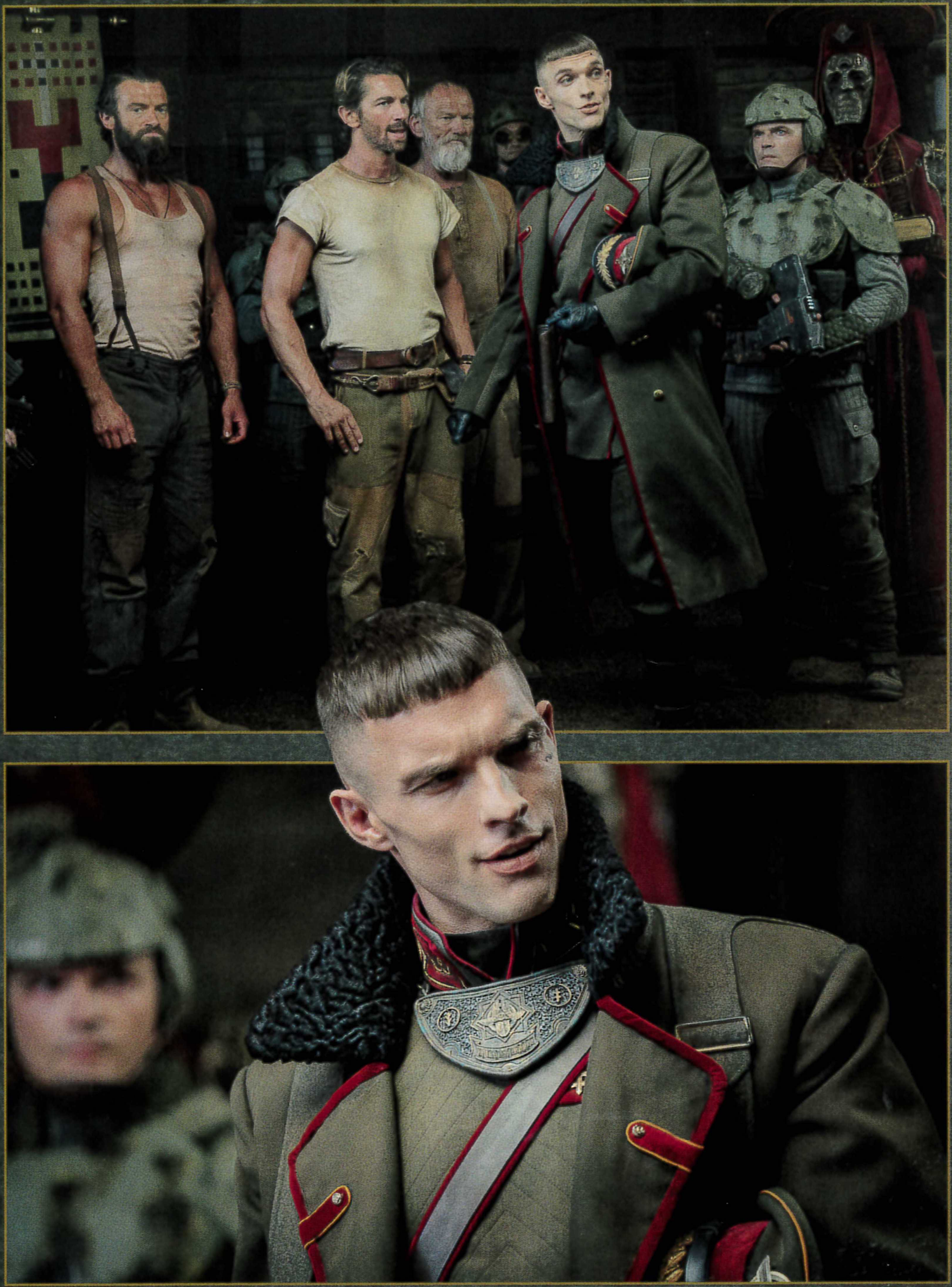
ADMIRAL ATTICUS NOBLE

SNYDER IS BLUNT in his assessment of the admiral: "Noble is our bad guy." He also sketches in some of the background that makes him so. "He's an incredible warrior, raised in the military schools that Titus was raised in. He's been out for a while, away from the Motherworld for about a year on this campaign to squish out the resistance, and that also lends to his ruthlessness. He's gone off the rails a little bit with his morality, so we have him butting heads with our group."

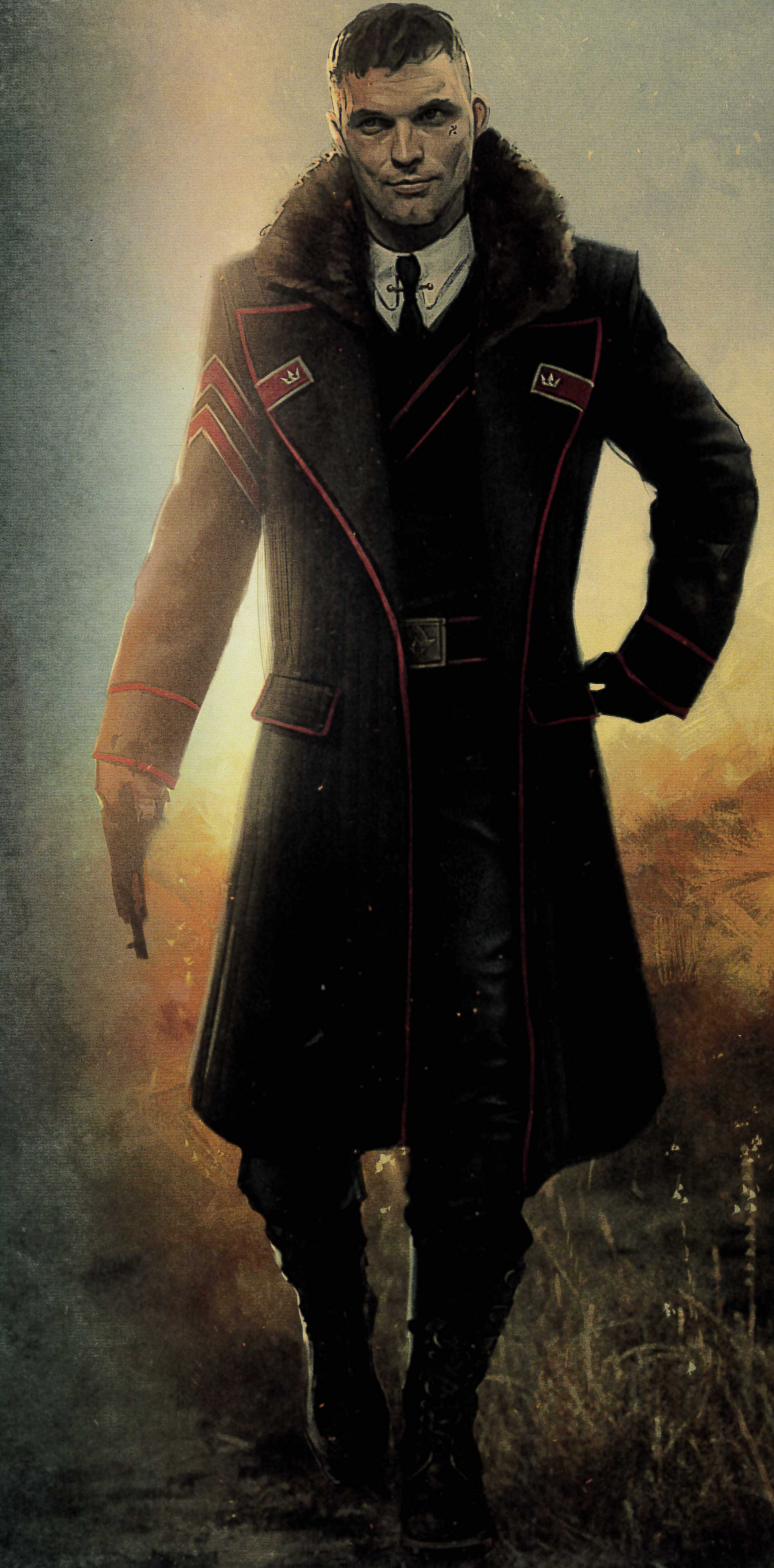
British actor Ed Skrein (*Game of Thrones*, *Deadpool*) plays the sadistic commander of *The King's Gaze* on the hunt for rebels. "When you look at Noble, you see the harshest type of military savageness," Skrein says. "You see a ruthless, cold man, who has chosen horror over morality for the directness of it. In a world or a universe where morality is waning, he has cast morality aside in the name of ambition."





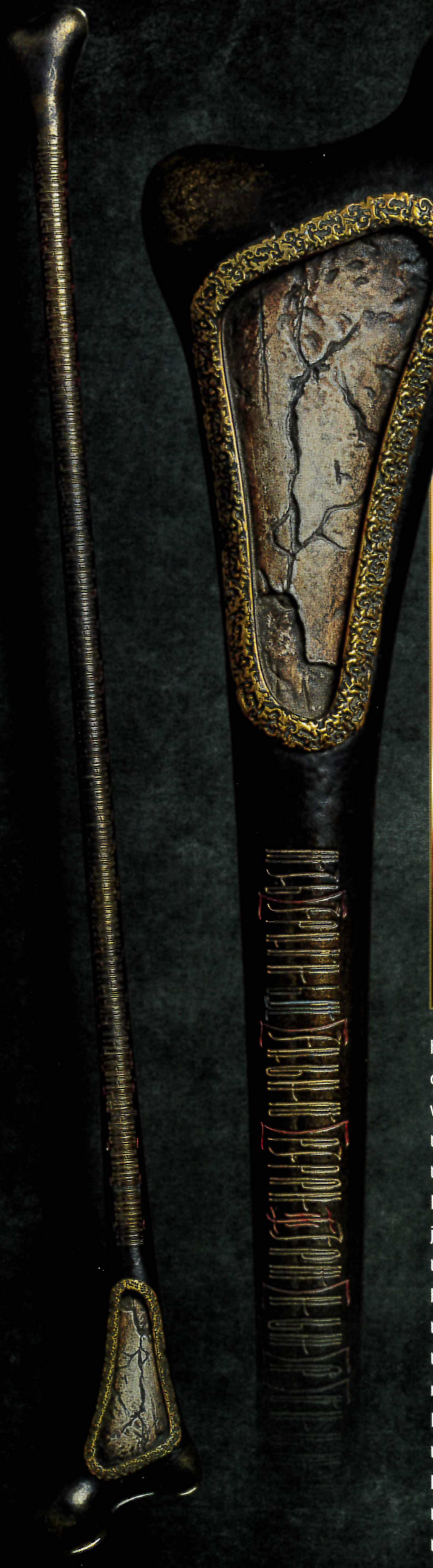


◀▲▶ Concept art and shots of the despicable Noble (Ed Skrein) in his impeccable admiral's uniform.



That ambition shows its face most clearly when Noble shifts his focus away from trying to find the Bloodaxe siblings. "These are small- to mid-fry kinds of targets, and while I'm looking for them, I find the greatest prize of all—the most wanted fugitive in the known universe: Arthelais, Scar Giver, the Hated One, Kora," Skrein relates. "As he sees it, if he can bring Arthelais back to the Senate, he can bring pride to his family name, and he can finally be taken seriously and be given the respect that he feels he deserves. I suppose it's going down, searching for silver, and finding the biggest lump of gold."

Speaking of gold, Noble's iconic, gilded bone staff deserves a mention. "The staff is an extension of Noble," Skrein says. "First of all, it's just so aesthetically beautiful. Secondly, it



Noble and his beloved bone staff.

has this incredible conceptual history. It's a bone from an extinct dinosaur/dodo/dragony kind of creature that no one's ever seen, which is so fragile, but so holy, that they covered it in this metal. Then there's a poem on the side—'The Second Coming' by W.B. Yeats—though it's written in the Mother Tongue, so no one would know that. I'm not just holding this thing. It's not just in the background. It's not just on display in Noble's office. It is front and center, and it drives the story in terms of how I use it and who I use it on. I love it. I call her Stella. But this is the interesting thing," he continues, "a lot of the time when I'm using my staff, I have a gun in my holster. I choose not to draw it. In fact, the bone staff isn't even my main weapon. Noble's main weapon is his tongue. I have all this military might behind me, I choose to come down and wax lyrical; I choose to come down and talk. I choose to let people talk their way into trouble, while seeming like I'm giving the chance for them to talk their way out. I'll use my tongue as a weapon, and then I'll finish them with the bone staff. I think that goes a long way to explaining Noble's character."

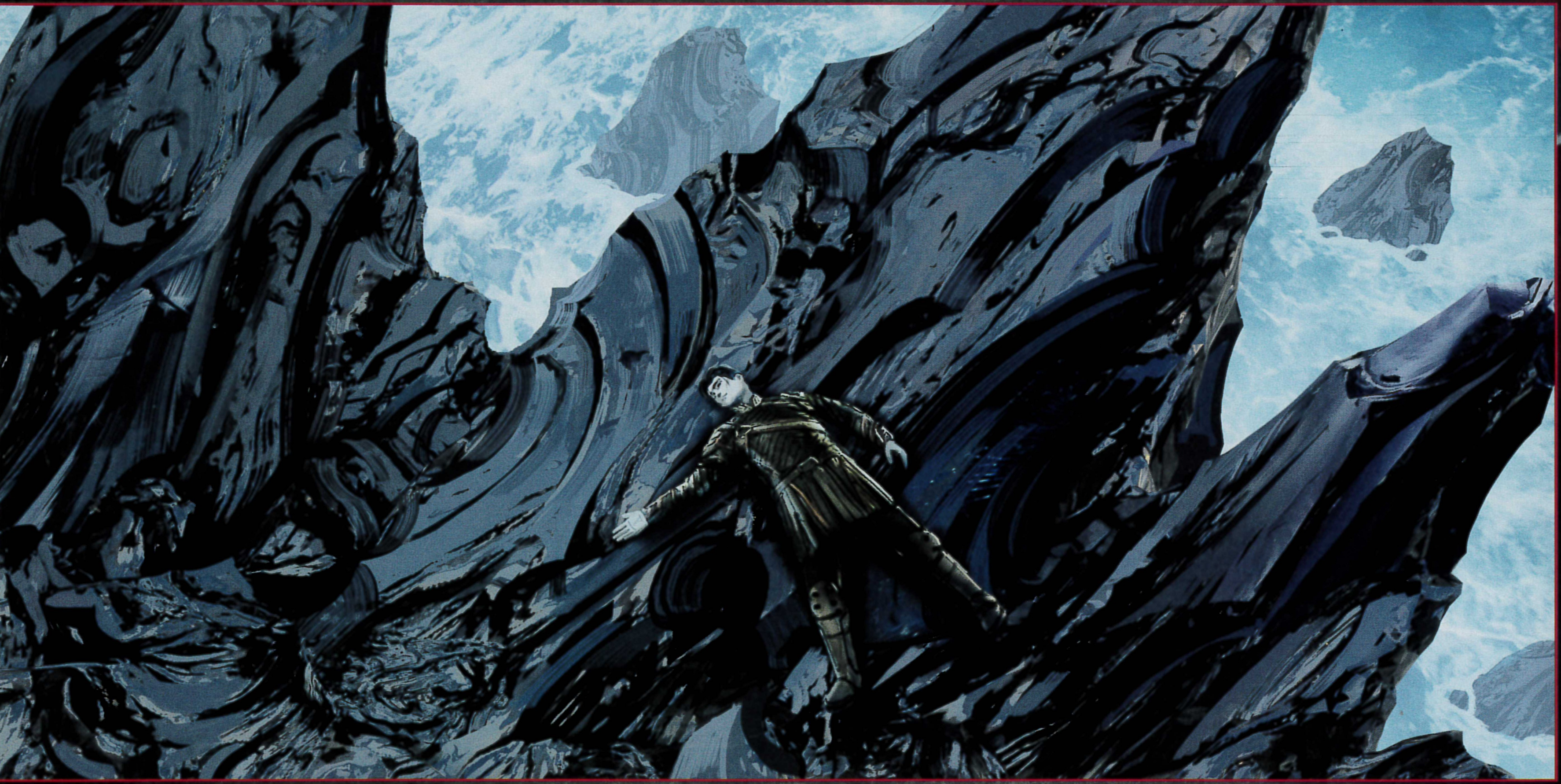
It should come as no surprise, then, that Skrein had the most fun shooting a scene that involved Noble showing off his talent for both talking and for wielding Stella. "That was during a heat wave in California in August, when it was over 110 degrees [Fahrenheit]—over 40 degrees [Celsius] for British viewers," he says. "I was wearing knee-high leather boots, a full wool military suit, leather gloves, leather hat, overcoat with fur collar in that heat, and it was my favorite scene to shoot. Why? Because, first of all, it's such an incredibly written scene. Just on the page when I was back in London, I was like, 'I can't wait to shoot this scene!' But when we got out here, some magic happened with Corey [Stoll], who played Father Sindri. He was such a generous actor, a wonderfully alive and responsive actor in the scene. That really brought out the best in me. It was one of the most profound shooting experiences I've ever had, actually."

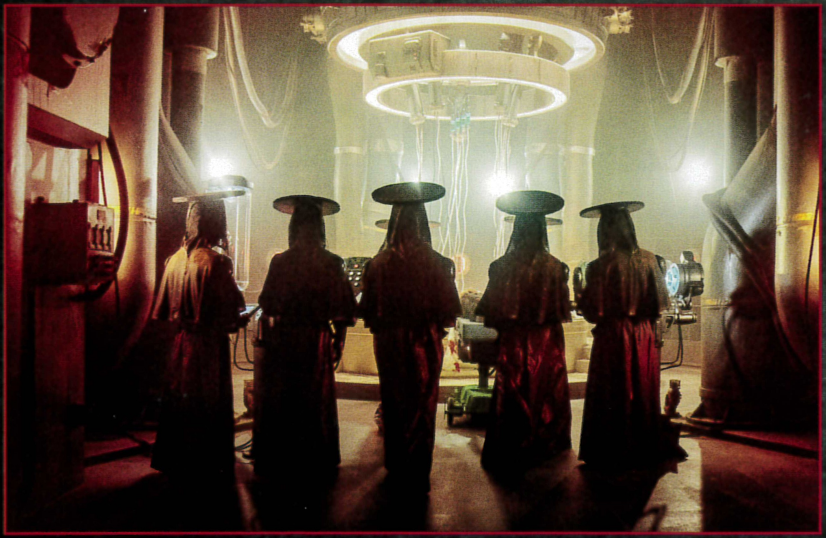
▼ Priests watch impassively as Noble bashes Sindri's skull in.

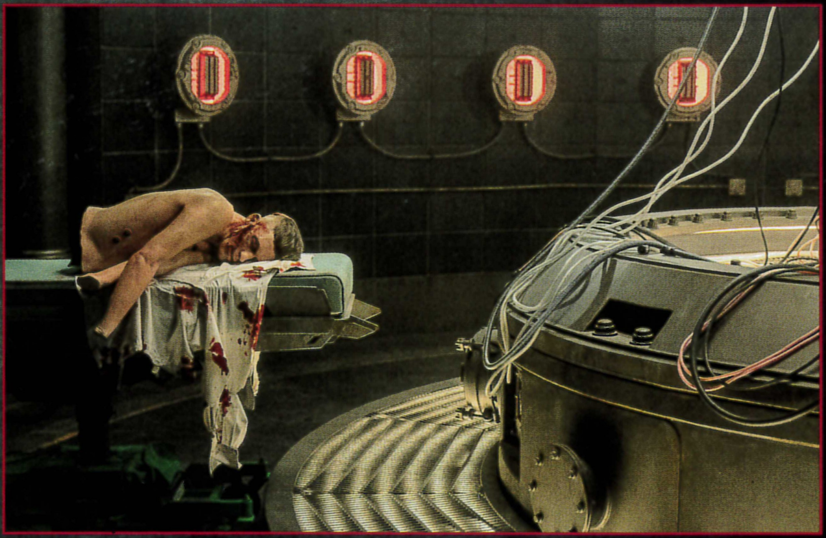
CRYOCHAMBER

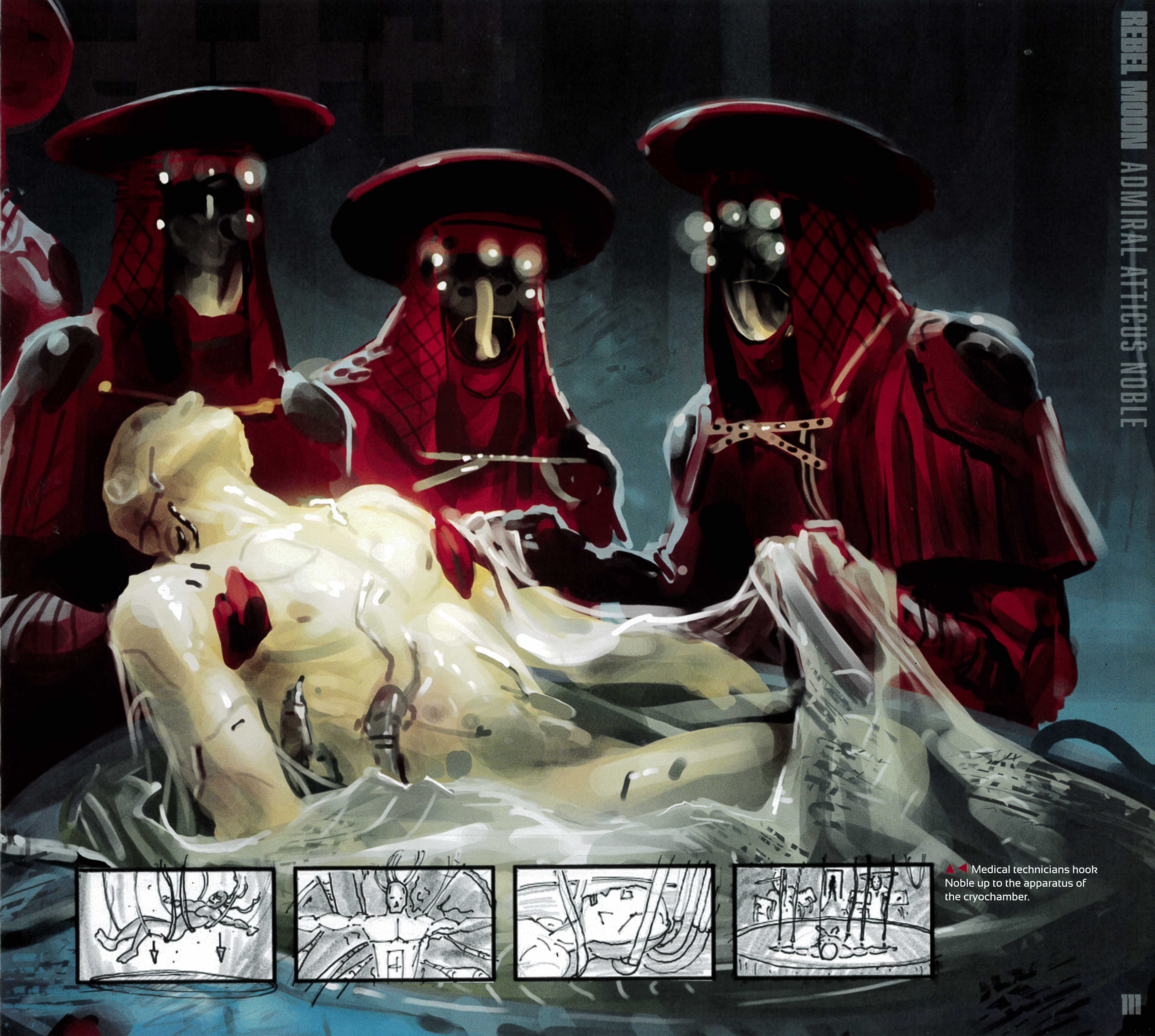
A major point on Noble's arc is when he seemingly dies at Gondival, only to be revived through the dark technology of an Motherworld cryochamber. In the process, he experiences an unsettling mental conversation with Balisarius, who makes it utterly clear to him that the continued use of this second chance at life is wholly dependent upon his completing his mission and returning with Kora. "This is about regeneration. This is about rebirth," Skrein says. "With somebody like Noble, that's scary and ominous and worrying for everybody else—literally everybody else, even the people who are my allies before that. It's going to be a problem after I've been brought back."

▼ Concept art for the "death" of Noble and his subsequent revivification.

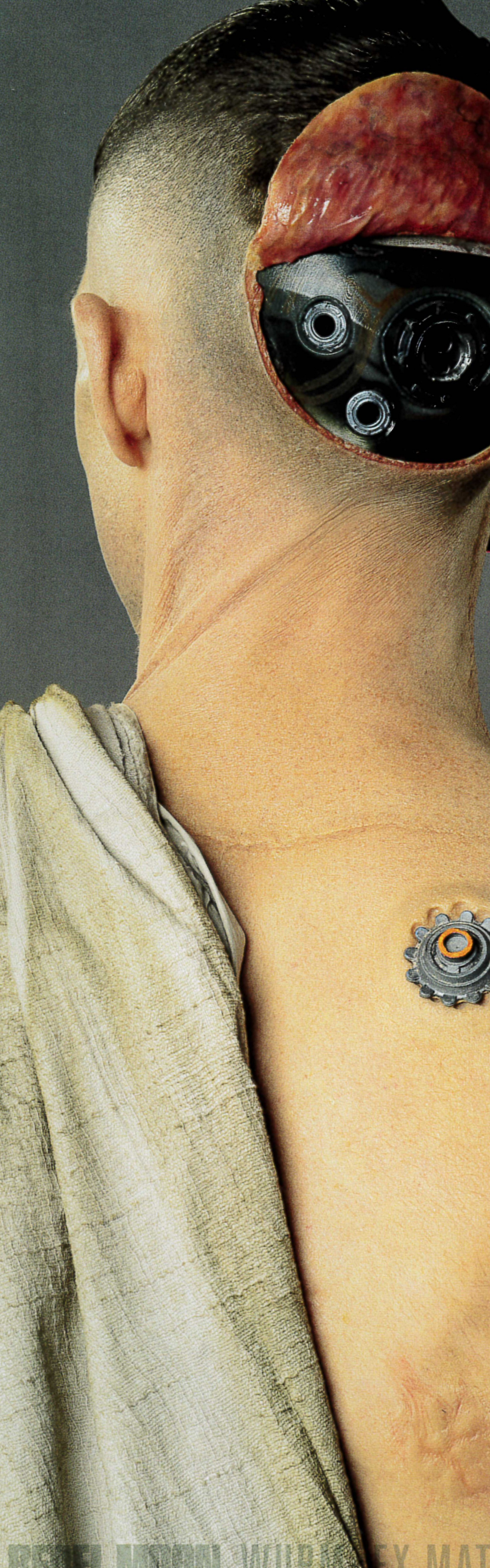


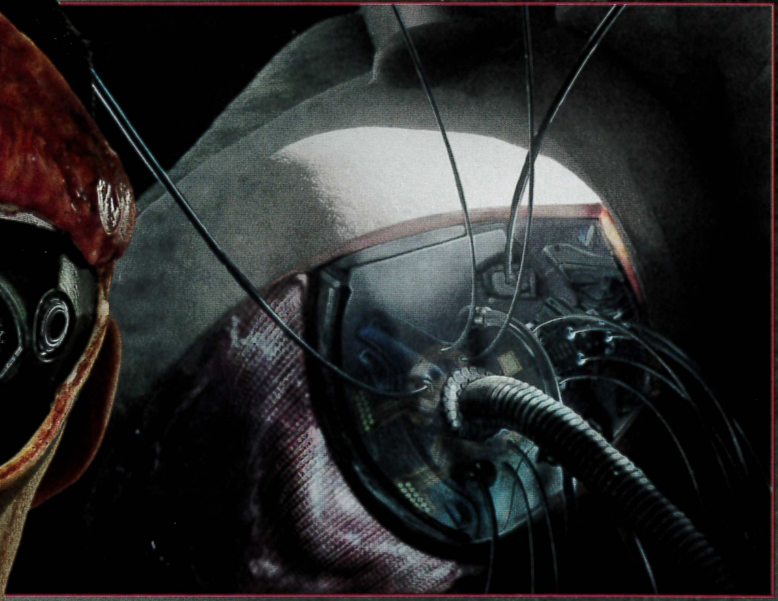






▲◀ Medical technicians hook Noble up to the apparatus of the cryochamber.





◄▲► Make-up and visual effects wizardry aided Noble's journey back to the land of the living.

When designing the cryochamber, form and storytelling came before function. "It was fun working on the cryochamber, just because it is kind of an art piece," production designer Stefan Dechant explains. "How does it sculpturally need to look, as opposed to what does it practically do? That set wasn't designed with me thinking, 'If you're going to reassemble the human body, how does that happen?' It was looking at the storyboards that were created by Zack and understanding his intention for the scene, and then creating the environment that felt unique to it." Similar considerations went into deciding what would be shown on the medical displays. "We're not trying to sell this scene to people who have eight years of medical school behind them. We want the audience to know what's going on. What's the process that Noble's going through? When does his heart start up again? What's going on with his brain functions? It's about simplifying that imagery, so that it creates a graphic that you understand, and how it relates to the greater narrative of what's happening to the character," Dechant says.

In addition to amazing production design and considerable VFX and SFX, reviving the admiral relied heavily on the makeup effects department. "They bring him into the cryochamber, where we reveal that he's got these ports all over his body, and they're plugging all these tubes into him," says makeup effects artist Justin Raleigh, head of Fractured FX, describing the process. "That is a combination of prosthetics on Ed, a full back piece that has all the ports that line up on it, multiple chest pieces, and he's got a whole back-of-the-head appliance with a flap that can magnetize open that has the port built into it. Then we have a full upper body that's an insert torso—so you can actually see these long rods getting plunged into his body and locked in place, and into the back of his head. Once he gets into the fluid, he goes into a chrysalis stage. We actually have a whole chrysalis body that's built for that. That was translucent fiberglass, so it could be filled with fluid and pulled up out of the water."

Filling that tank is a proprietary blend of slime, made to order by a company that produces a lot of gel products for the film industry. "There is about 1000 gallons in the tank. We maintain a temperature around 95-100 degrees, so it's comfortable for the body to be in for a period of time. It has a nice, slimy feel to it. It was manufactured in the five hours prior, so that it comes out fresh and warm, and just ready to last for the week that we need it," says special effects foreman Anthony De La Cruz. "We did a test with Ed, so that he could get the feel of what he was getting himself into. Always good to know that [the actor is] comfortable and feels safe in it."

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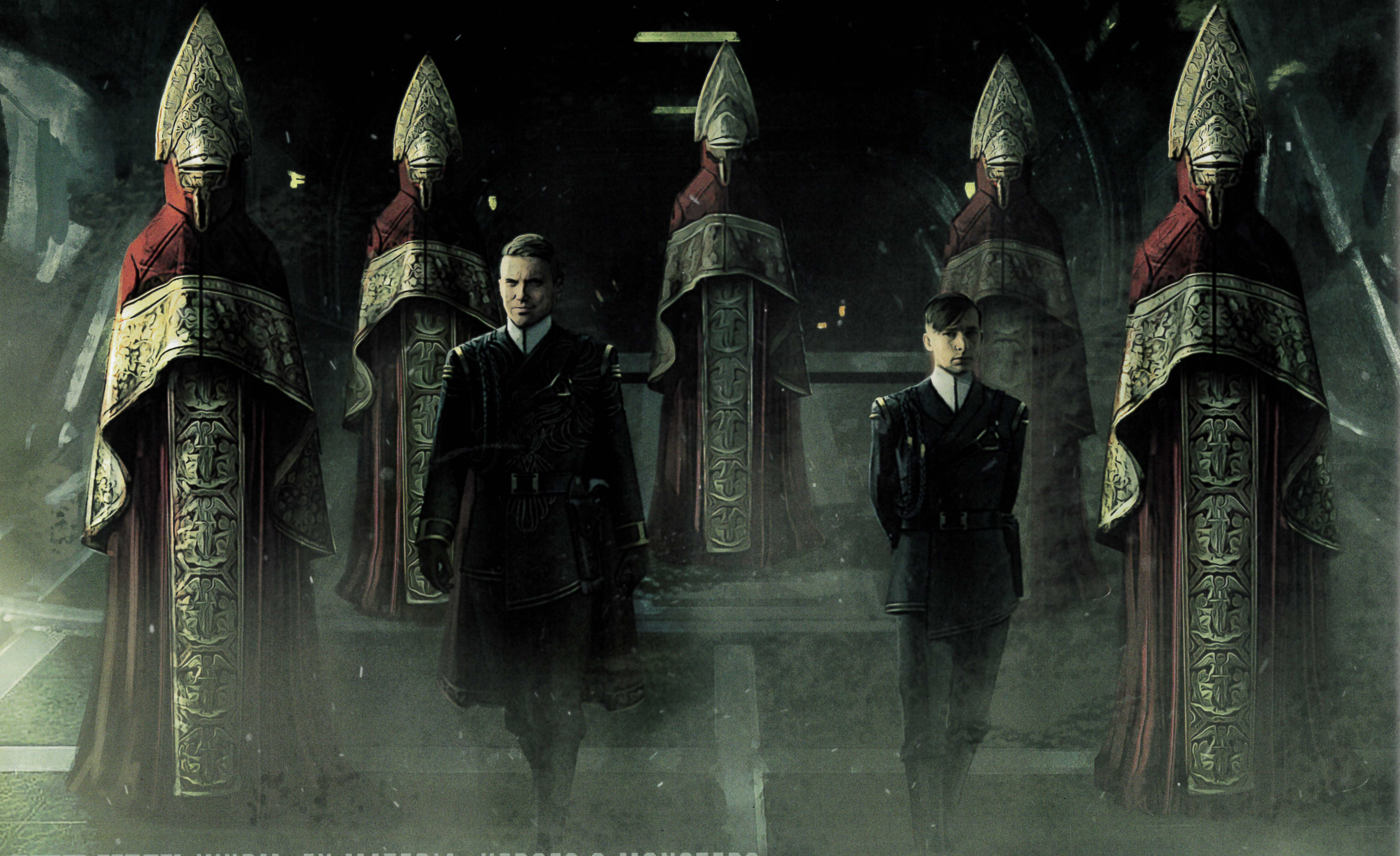
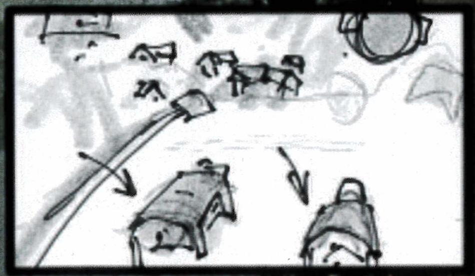
VILLAINS

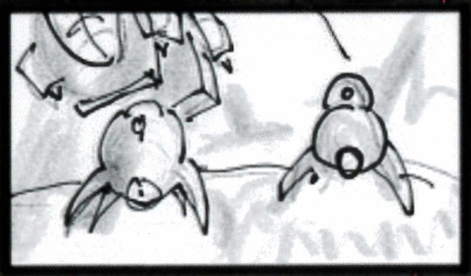
CASSIUS

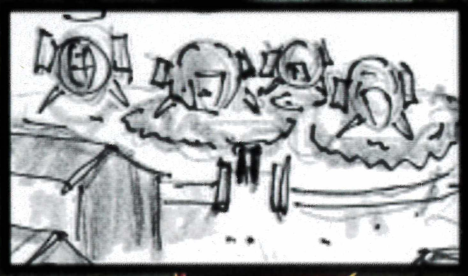
BEFORE THE DISASTROUS EVENTS on Gondival, Admiral Noble's steadfast aide, Cassius, is rarely absent from his side. "In part one, truly, it's a triangle of me, Cassius, and the bone staff out there on the front lines, progressing things, let's say," relates Skrein. Mexican actor Alfonso Herrera (*Sense8*, *Ozark*) plays Cassius, and observes that their partnership is at such a level that Cassius hardly bats an eye anymore when Noble bashes in someone's skull or chooses to spend his off hours with tentacled aliens. "There is a very strong connection between each other. It's a relationship that has grown through the years," Herrera observes. "With just a look, they understand each other. And Noble, I think, in a certain way, he's grateful towards Cassius because of how loyal he is."

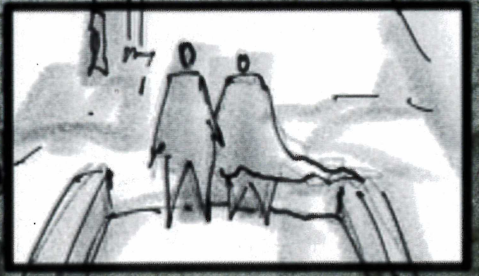
▼ Early concept art for Cassius, Noble, and their priestly entourage.

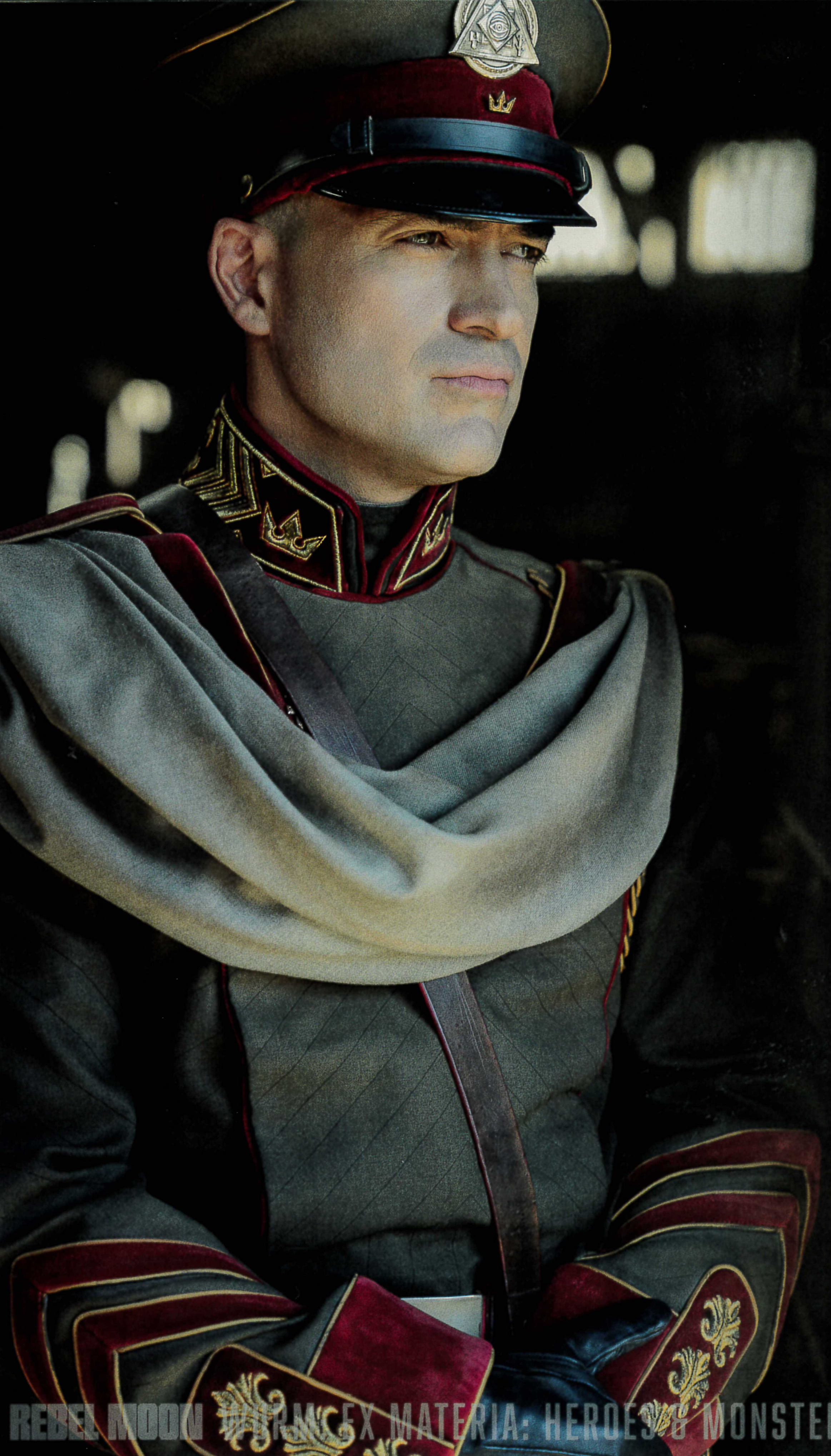












However, Herrera also likes to dig deeper, and hints that there could be limits to that loyalty and that Cassius could toss it aside for ambition's sake. "What I see about this character is he has a very interesting perspective on what is happening around him. He's always in the shadows, looking and waiting for the right moment for him to overcome," he says. "He's Noble's right hand, but at the same time, he's just waiting for the right time for him to progress, to gain a little bit more power. That has been Cassius's life since he was a regular soldier, all the way to where he is now."

This instinct for self-preservation and self-promotion probably arose from his youth, which Herrera feels followed a familiar pattern. "My point of view is that Cassius lived in a planet far away, and the Motherworld, at some point, arrived on this planet in order to take away all the resources, and all his family was killed," he says. "In order for him to survive, he joined the army, and little by little, he progressed. He understood how the Motherworld worked, all the way to becoming Noble's right hand."

Rising through the ranks is obviously more pleasant if you get along well with your boss. The same is true for actors who have to spend a lot of time together. "My relationship with Ed [Skrein] is amazing," Herrera says. "We share two passions: our work and football. So, between takes we are always talking about soccer. He's a huge Liverpool fan, I'm a huge Barcelona fan, and it's always fun to work with him." That compatibility extended to the rest of the cast and crew, as well. "Something that is very unique about this project is how respectful everyone is with one another. Even though sometimes I don't share scenes with them, there is this camaraderie, and they're always respectful. Having a place where you can play in a safe way, in a fun way. It's a great place to work," he says.

We get our first impression of the Motherworld when Noble and Cassius emerge from the dropship on Veldt, so the facade they project needed to be instantly intimidating. "There are certain things that are in all our frames of reference, no matter where we are on planet Earth, from the middle of the twentieth century, that elicit a visceral response. The visual definition of the Motherworld follows that fall of Imperial Russia and its descent into the more fascist Bolshevik version—ultimately Soviet version," explains costume designer Stephanie Portnoy Porter. This current military aesthetic could then be contrasted with that of the previous regime. "From this extravagant, decadent, imperial, lavish look of the Motherworld from the flashbacks, we strip everything back to what I like to call the propaganda-poster version of what we had before. The ideals and the iconography, for the most part, is the same, but it's the much harsher and sharper-lined version," she says.

The costumes, then, put us in the proper head space when evaluating the Motherworld, what it represents, and how it relates to us. "The uniforms, when I look at them, have some Bolshevik elements that are so fascinating, and at the same time, have some monarchic hints. So many elements that connect with universal history, like the Nazis, conquistadors arriving in America, reaping all the resources. There are so many elements that can connect on so many levels. It's a world that is so rich," Herrera says.

▶ Cassius (Alfonso Herrera) on the bridge of *The King's Gaze*.

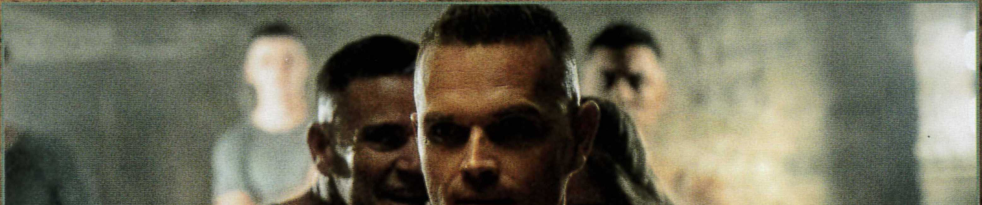
VILLAINS

FAUNUS & MARCUS

IN CHARGE OF THE DETACHMENT of Imperial troops sent by Noble to oversee the grain harvest on Veldt, Faunus, played by Brandon Auret, lords over civilians and underlings alike with the help of his second in command, Marcus, played by Greg Kriek. Bullies who feed off each other's cruelty, Faunus and Marcus delight in abusing and imposing their whims on others unable to fight back, such as Jimmy and Sam. That all ends when Kora decides enough is enough.

◀▲▼ Marcus and Faunus get more than they bargained for in the sleepy village of Veldt.

Both huge Snyder fans, the pair of South African actors feel that however short-lived their reign of terror was, it was worth it. From the friendliness of the cast and crew to the exacting precision of the stunt team, color them impressed. "Brandon and I have had the privilege to work on many different projects all over the world, and I have never seen something of this caliber, of this level," says Kriek. Auret echoes that: "It's an absolute pleasure. I get killed by Sir Anthony Hopkins. I'll take that." Kriek adds, "And I get my ass kicked by Sofia Boutella. I mean, sign me up!"



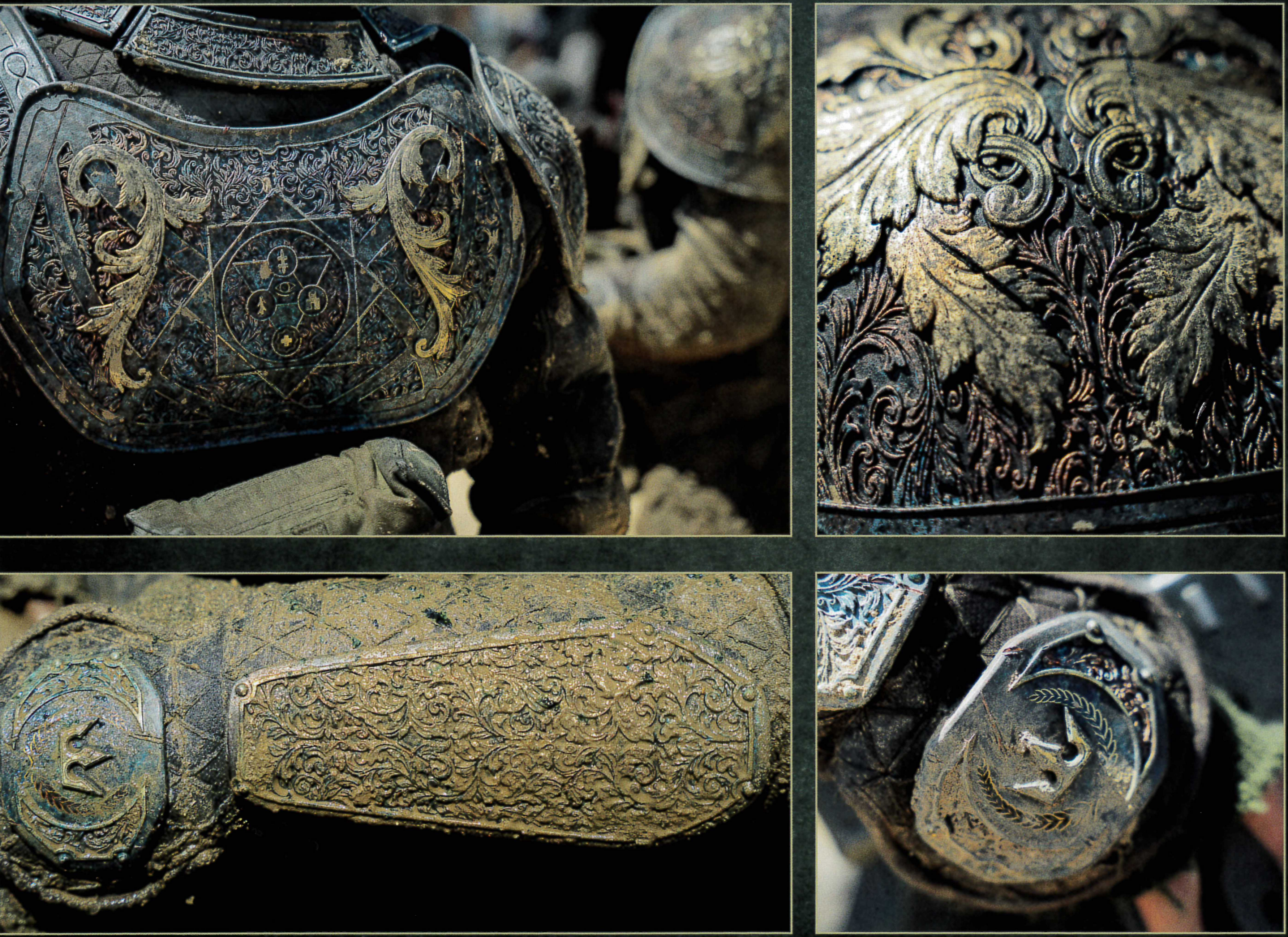
VILLAINS

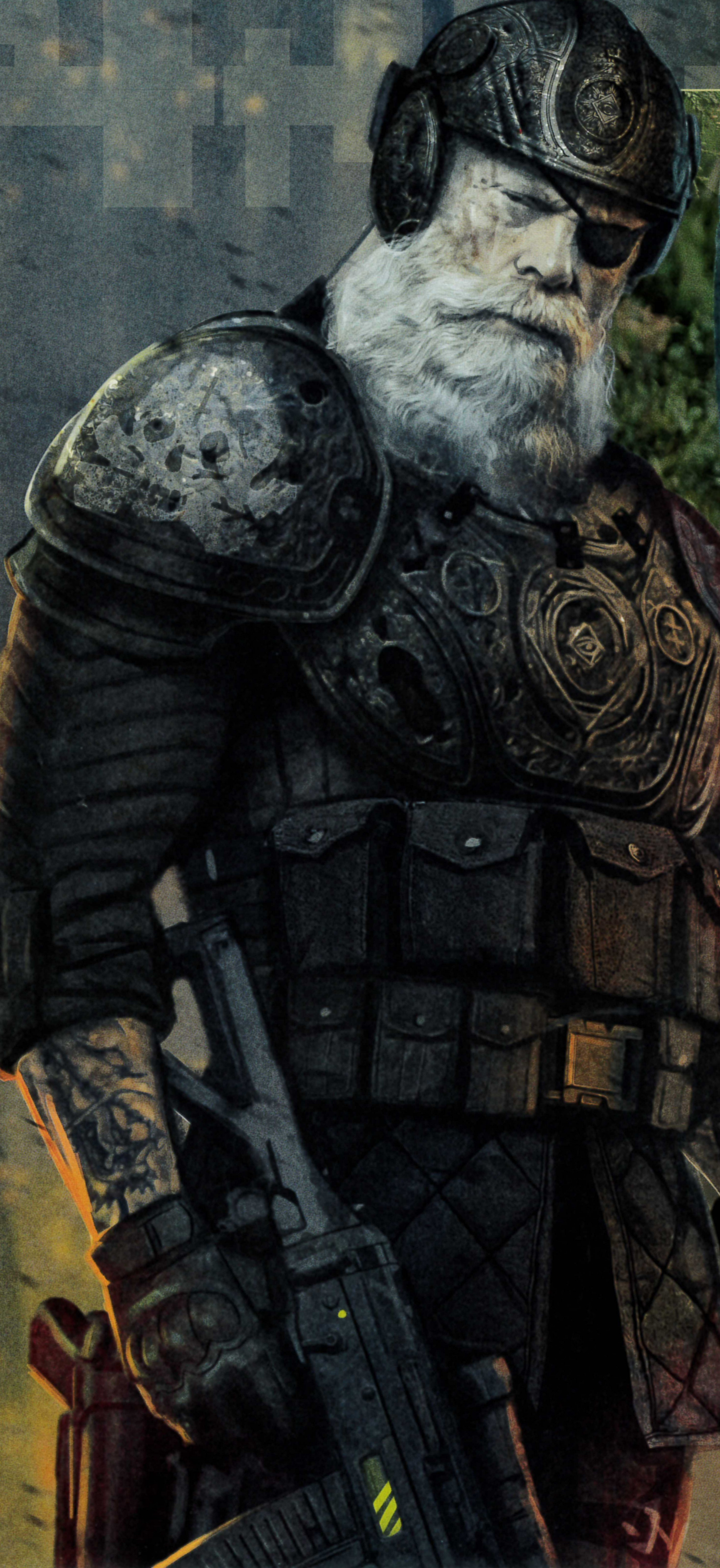
KRYPTEIAN GUARD

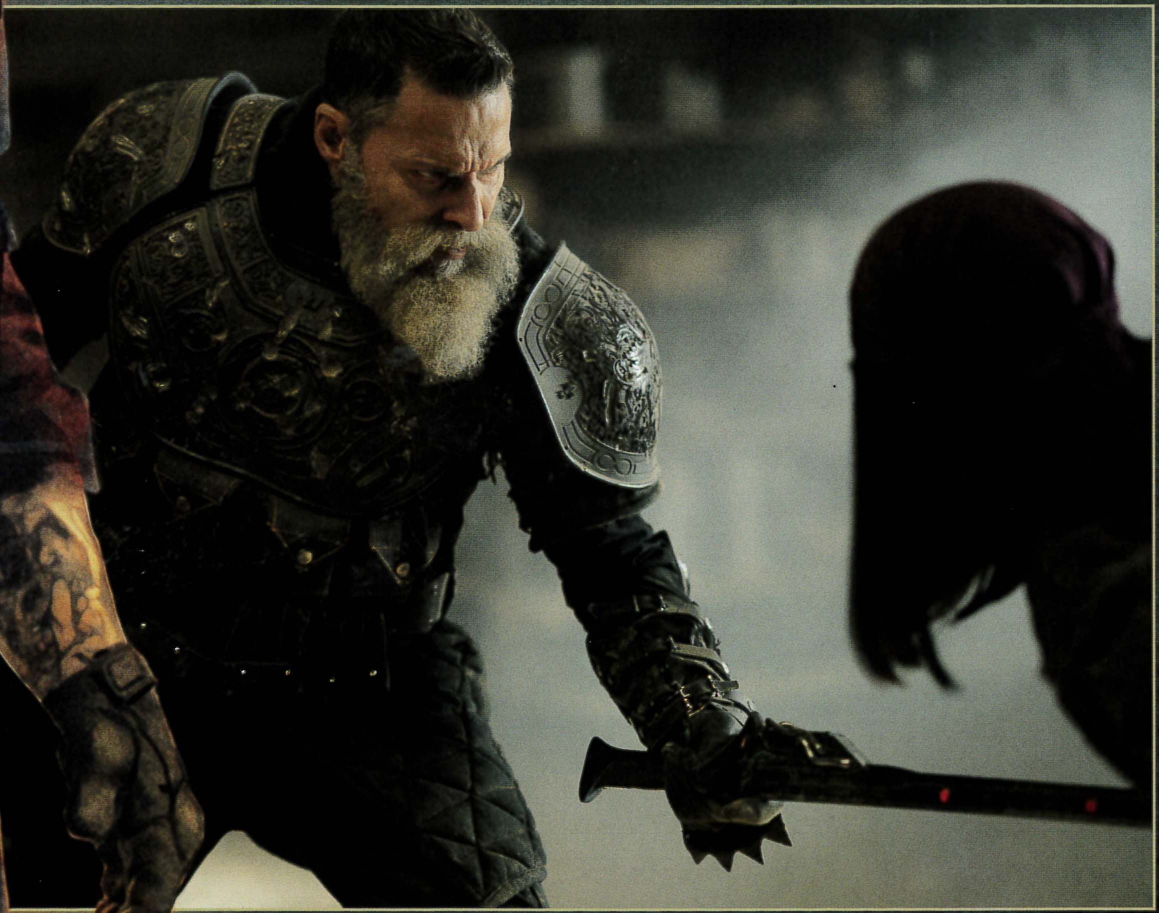
THE ORIGINS OF THE GUARD go far back into the distant past, and their fortunes have risen and fallen with the tides of history. "Before the Jimmys existed, the Krypteians filled that role of royal bodyguard, and also did sort of Navy SEAL jobs. When the Jimmys showed up, they were relegated to protecting lesser nobles and things like that," Snyder explains. "As more Jimmys were put out on the front lines, they made their way back up in the background, as sort of royal mercenaries that could be bought to protect you and do dark deeds. What they found out was that the Jimmys had this weird morality that prevented them from doing the real dark work, and so that's how the Krypteians made their way back in—doing the dirtiest of dirty jobs."

▼ Details of armor from the time of the King that has been adapted by the Krypteian Guard.

► Krypteians in their all-black armor.





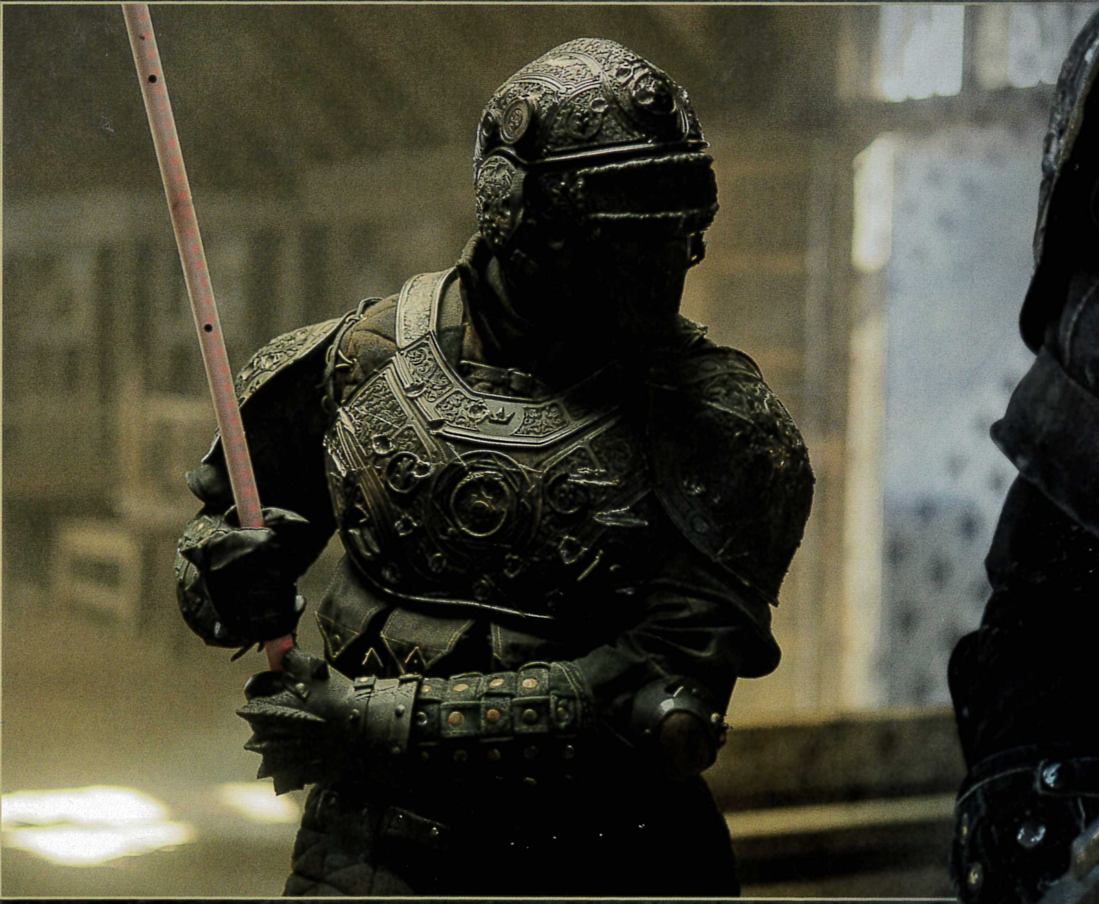


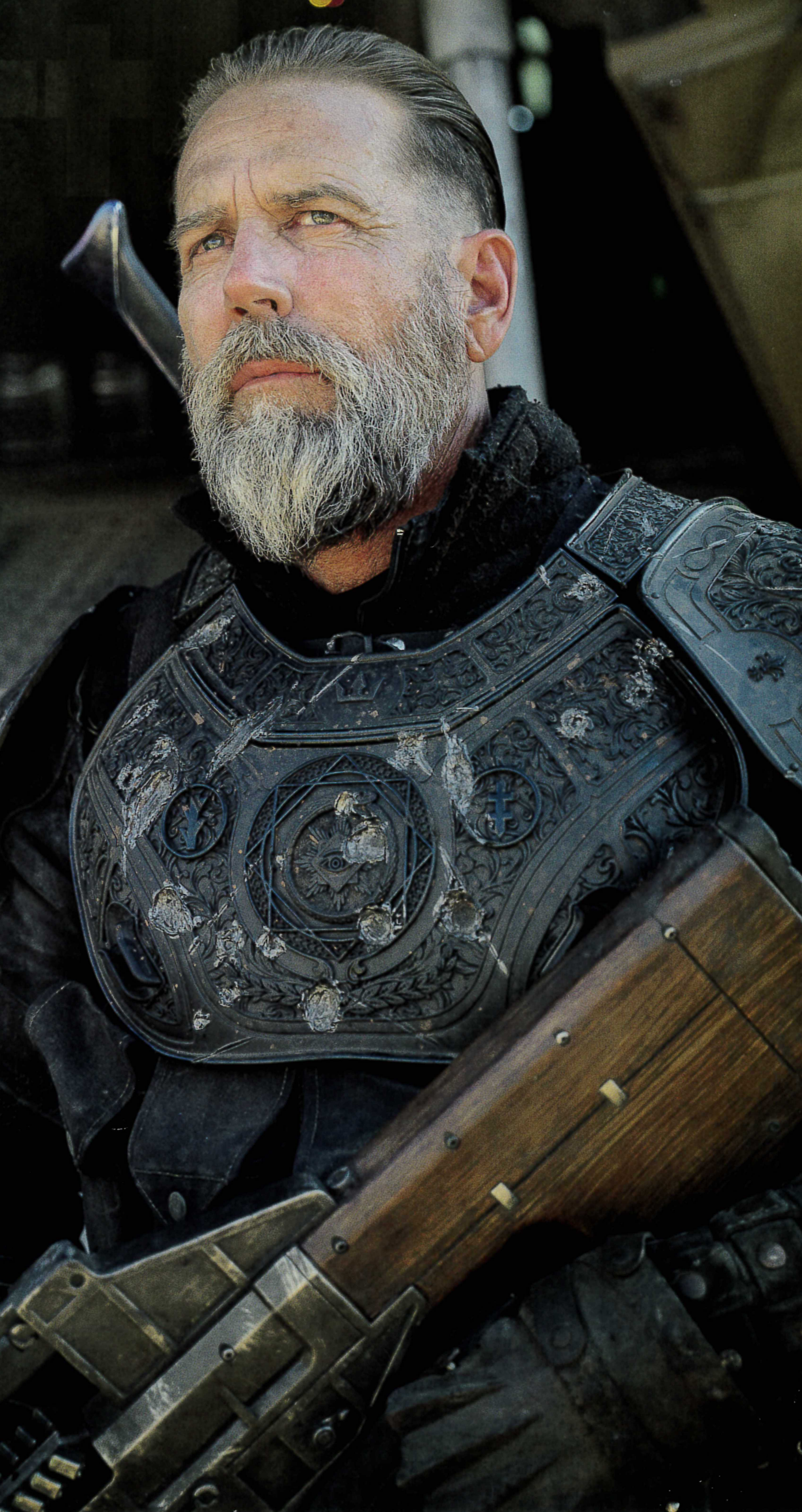
◀ Concept for the Krypteian commander.

▲ A Krypteian with an oracle steel blade.

Krypteians are born to fight, bred especially for combat on their harsh, strife-ridden home world. "They're like the Spartans of the universe. Their planet has had a tenuous relationship with the Motherworld, and over time they've always come through by supplying the soldiers they need. They're extra strong, but there's not many of them," Snyder says. "Frankly, the Motherworld was afraid to have too many of them in a single group. That's why they keep them in small groups. The fear was—and maybe it did happen a few times—that when a larger group of Krypteians band together, they became dangerous even to the Motherworld."

The Krypteians can be distinguished from other infantry by their characteristic black armor. Instead of the beautifully crafted, artisan components of a Jimmy, however, the intention was to make the Krypteians' overall look feel more manufactured and disposable. Their standard firearm is the Motherworld heavy. "We gave that to both the Jimmys and to the Krypteians, figuring that this gun was so big you'd need to be one of the super soldiers to deal with it," prop master Brad Elliott says. For close combat, "They have their oracle-steel swords, that are externally powered," Snyder explains. "There's a little power unit on them. Clumsy wiring, crude. Those are unlike Nemesis's swords, which are made of the same kind of metal but are more elegant because her power source is her. She's more in harmony with her swords. The Krypteians have had to retrofit and glue things on to make them work, and so defile the beautiful symmetry of the thing. That's why they wear those gloves, so they can hold the swords. It's kind of like an oven mitt."





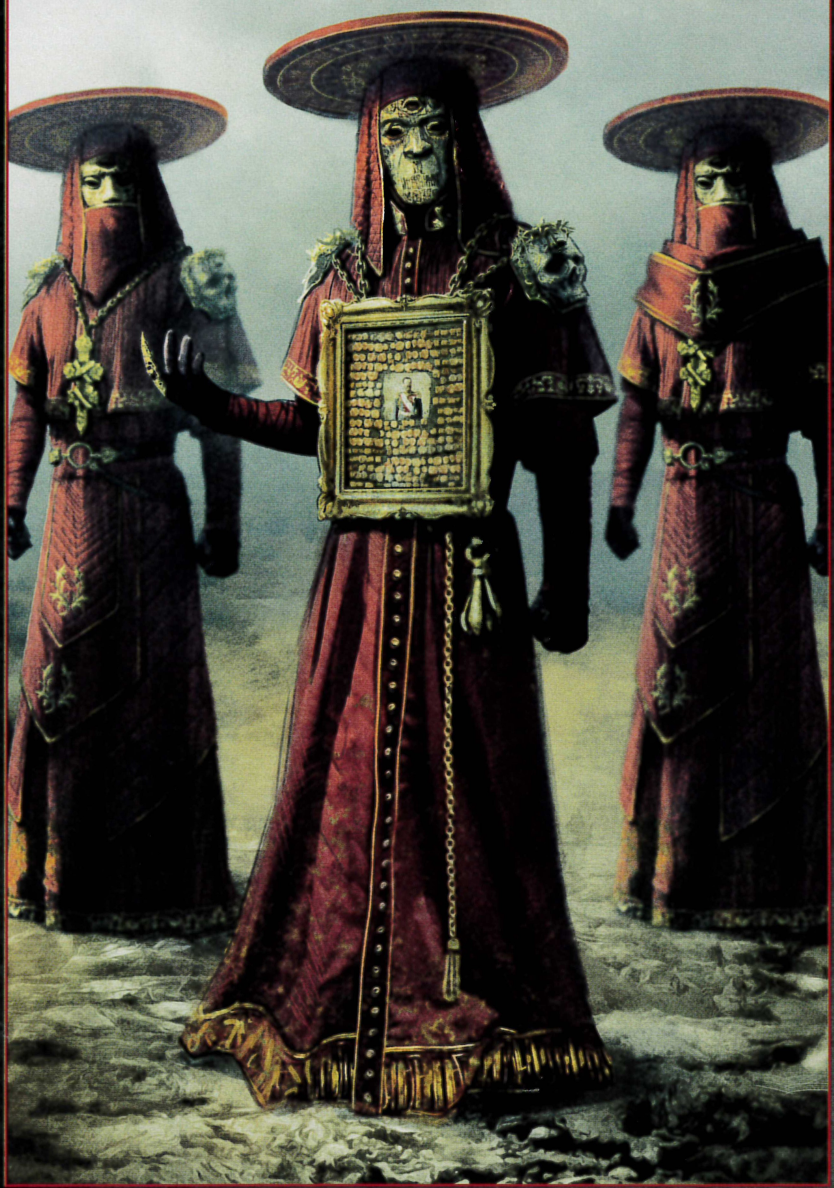
▶ Actor/stuntman Mike Justus.

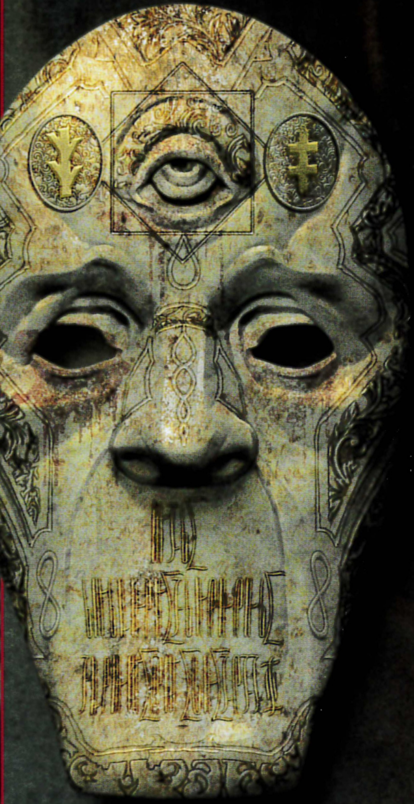
VILLAINS

PRIESTS

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, no army of the Motherworld has taken the field without being accompanied by this venerable priesthood whose origins are lost in the mists of time, and said to predate the monarchy itself. The sacred function of this clergy on the front lines is threefold: Firstly, the hallowed presence of the Priests boosts morale by reaffirming to the troops that their cause is a righteous one. Secondly, there is no delay in spreading the eternal truths and mysteries of the faith of the Realm to newly integrated worlds. Finally, and most importantly, the Priests (also known as Scribes) act as chroniclers, recording in exacting detail the proud history of the Motherworld's triumphs. This last is accomplished not simply through words, as witnessed by the Priests in Admiral Noble's entourage, who bear a solemn portrait of the departed Princess Issa, framed by the teeth of planetary leaders who failed to render proper obeisance to the Realm.

▶▶ A Priest displays a trophy.





◀ Constructing the tooth frame.

▼ A Priest takes a breather behind the scenes.

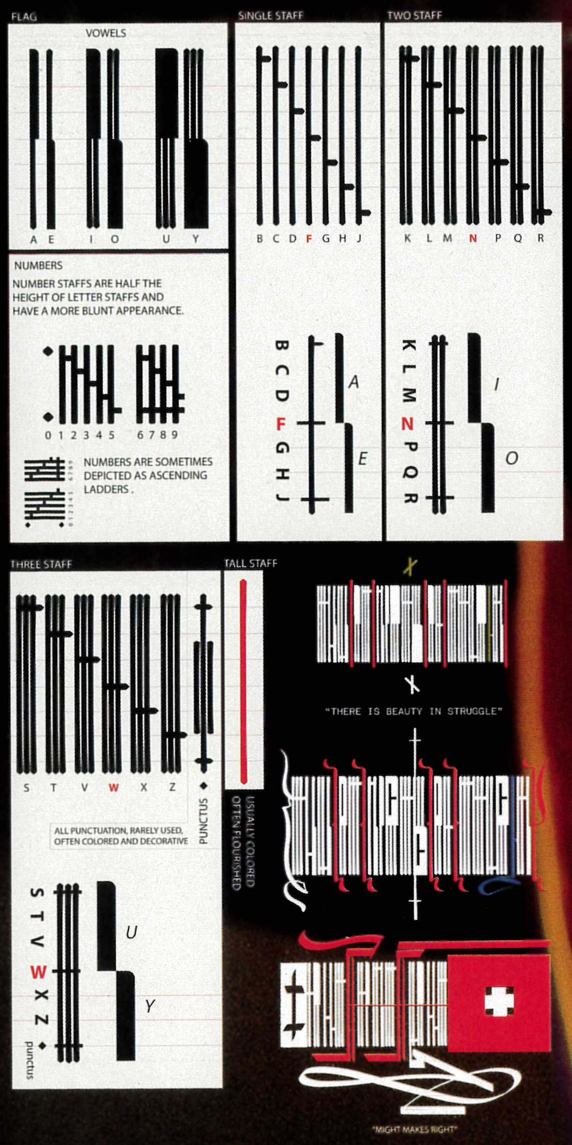
"Their religion is information. They hold immense power, because they control the narrative of the Motherworld. They're the gatekeepers of history records and how events are seen in retrospect," Snyder explains. "The high Scribes can project their mind into the page's mind—the world of information—where they can change things, move things to the front or back. Less powerful Scribes, they'll have a port put in their head so they can enter this dream state. People give them respect, give them what they want—teeth or whatever else—because their place in history is determined by whether or not they're in good standing with the Scribes. It's almost like your immortal soul is memory, either destroyed or built up based on your relationship to the Scribes."

This ability of high-level Priests to travel mentally into a space beyond matter also serves them in a couple of ways in addition to recording and controlling history—ways that are known to only a select few within the Motherworld. "If you're going to communicate over vast distances, that's done in the Astral Plane, where they are the gatekeepers. We see Balisarius do this in the first movie," says Snyder. "The Astral Plane is also the realm where the Kalis are." (See the section on the Kali below for the mysterious relationship between the Priests and these extraordinary creatures.)

"When you're creating these worlds that don't exist, and there's no source material, it was important for me to give people some visual frame of reference that has, for the most part, a universal emotion attached to it," explains costume designer Stephanie Portnoy Porter, on creating the iconic looks for the Priests. "So, the cassock shape is very much like those we've seen before in Catholicism, in Orthodoxy, etc. From there, we played up the over-the-top excessiveness." That included sayings in Imperial script, screen printed on the borders of the robes to mimic gold enamel.

Considerable thought also went into designing the priestly headpieces and masks, in order to link them closely to the Motherworld visual continuity. "I looked at a lot of sculpture, because it had to pack a punch with the silhouette," Portnoy Porter says. "We played with a few shapes in the illustration/concept phase. Some were logistically not possible, even though they were visually really cool, because they have to walk out of the spaceship and we can't make them super tall. A ducking-down Priest doesn't look that cool! There are a lot of circles throughout the Motherworld, both in the sets and in costumes. You'll see some of the fancy ladies in the court on the Motherworld have these 1950s hats that mimic the same shape. Also, the medical technicians, so you blur the line between religion and healing. For the mask, I wanted everything almost like [Edvard Munch's painting] *The Scream*—having things elongated, but with a Brutalist kind of aesthetic. And their voices have been taken away, so we put the last lines of Goethe's *Faust*, in Imperial script, over the mouth. That 'Eternal Feminine' in the last line, we referenced in a lot of places, which I thought was so perfect."

OLD KINGDOM CALLIGRAPHY


FLAG
VOWELS
A E I O U Y
SINGLE STAFF
B C D F G H J
TWO STAFF
K L M N P Q R
NUMBERS
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9
B C D F G H J
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I
O
THREE STAFF
S T V W X Z
PUNCTUS
TALL STAFF
S T V W X Z
punctus
U
Y

NUMBER STAFFS ARE HALF THE HEIGHT OF LETTER STAFFS AND HAVE A MORE BLUNT APPEARANCE.

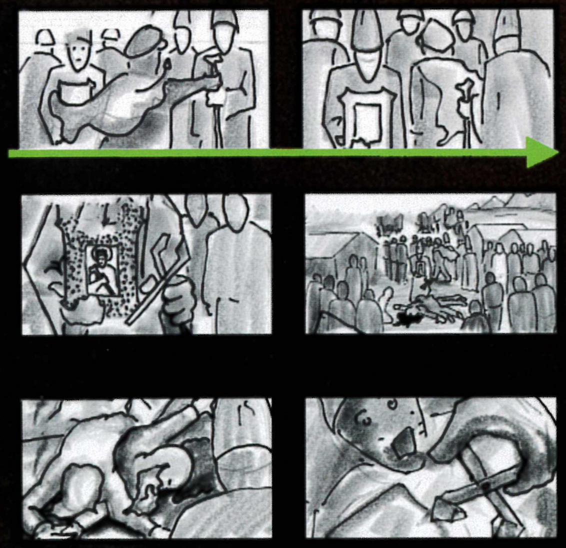
NUMBERS ARE SOMETIMES DEPICTED AS ASCENDING LADDERS .

ALL PUNCTUATION, RARELY USED, OFTEN COLORED AND DECORATIVE

USUALLY COLORED OFTEN FLOURISHED

"THERE IS BEAUTY IN STRUGGLE"

"MIGHT MAKES RIGHT"



THEMES

COLONIALISM

THE BEST GENRE FILMS may contain starships capable of devastating planets, godlike aliens and artificial beings, and desperate battles between seemingly super-powered heroes and villains, but they really aren't about that at all. The spectacle is used to comment on real-life issues. *Rebel Moon* is no different. As Sofia Boutella puts it, "Considering it's a giant sci-fi that takes place in a different world, there are also a lot of political aspects that are very similar to what we're living here on Earth. I think that's very relatable."

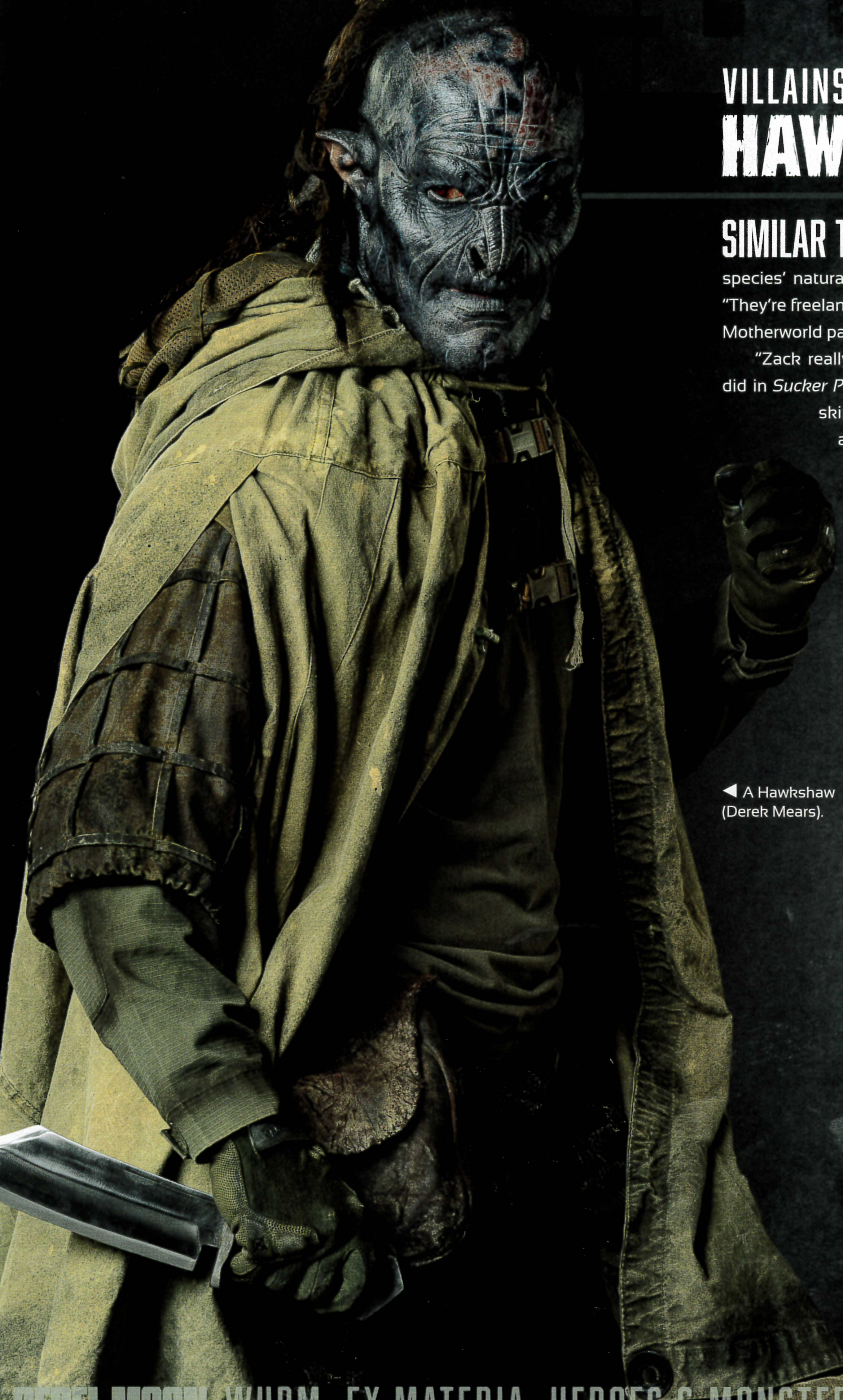
One cast member who found the films' through-line of colonialism and imperial aggression very relatable was Djimon Hounsou. "This filming has taken its toll on me in a way that I've never experienced before, physically and emotionally," he says. "Emotionally, I feel very moved by the story that we're telling. That resonates so much reality for me, in respect to the history of the French and its colonies, the story of America, the history of Europe, and looking at the present day, what's going on with Russia and Ukraine."

Coming from Benin, Hounsou sees direct parallels with the catastrophic experience of colonialism in Africa. "You have a great superpower that's basically coming to your land and telling you how you must run your people, how you must do your agriculture, how you must manage your finances. And if not, executes you," he explains. "Way after independence, those countries all still have some relation with the European countries. The continent of Africa feeds the world as far as minerals are concerned, as far as agriculture is concerned. You have countries planting crops that they don't consume... If you look at the Congo, it has nothing to show for its wealth."

His own character, Titus, while still in service to the Motherworld, fulfilled a role that Hounsou and all Africans are familiar with—a role that Titus eventually could stomach no more. "Titus's character is similar to political characters that you find today, that we call economic hitmen. These are so-called elite businessmen who are basically looking after their interest within the country, whether it's for the French, or the British, or the Americans. Oftentimes, when a new president is elected in Africa, that gentleman is there to let him know 'We have some interest in this country.' The very few African presidents who stood against that were executed, all of them. The fact that we're transposing this into a galactic environment is quite exciting. This story was absolutely rewarding as far as how I felt about our political world today."

This endless expansion and eternal hunger for resources has had a harmful effect not only on those worlds crushed under the Realm's polished boot heel, but on the Motherworld itself. While presenting a strong, well-ordered façade to the galaxy, at its core the Realm may be anything but, and the Regency under Balisarius only seems to be accelerating this inner slide toward entropy. It is evident in everything from the ornate-but-worn couture donned by the highest levels of Motherworld society, to the armor of its vaunted troops, marred by battle scars, minor repairs, and layers of increasingly hasty paint jobs applied in vain attempts to keep up appearances. The mighty fleet is impressive from a distance, but that belies the jarring asymmetries seen when viewed up close. Moreover, inside each fearsome dreadnought are cramped passageways in need of maintenance and a thorough cleaning. On the Motherworld itself, the once-proud Senate is now a crumbling marble edifice propped up by tacky metal scaffolding. All of these are symptomatic of a society that has relied for far too long on extracting the wealth and labor of others, and at its heart has ceased to care.

The King's Gaze arrives over Veldt.



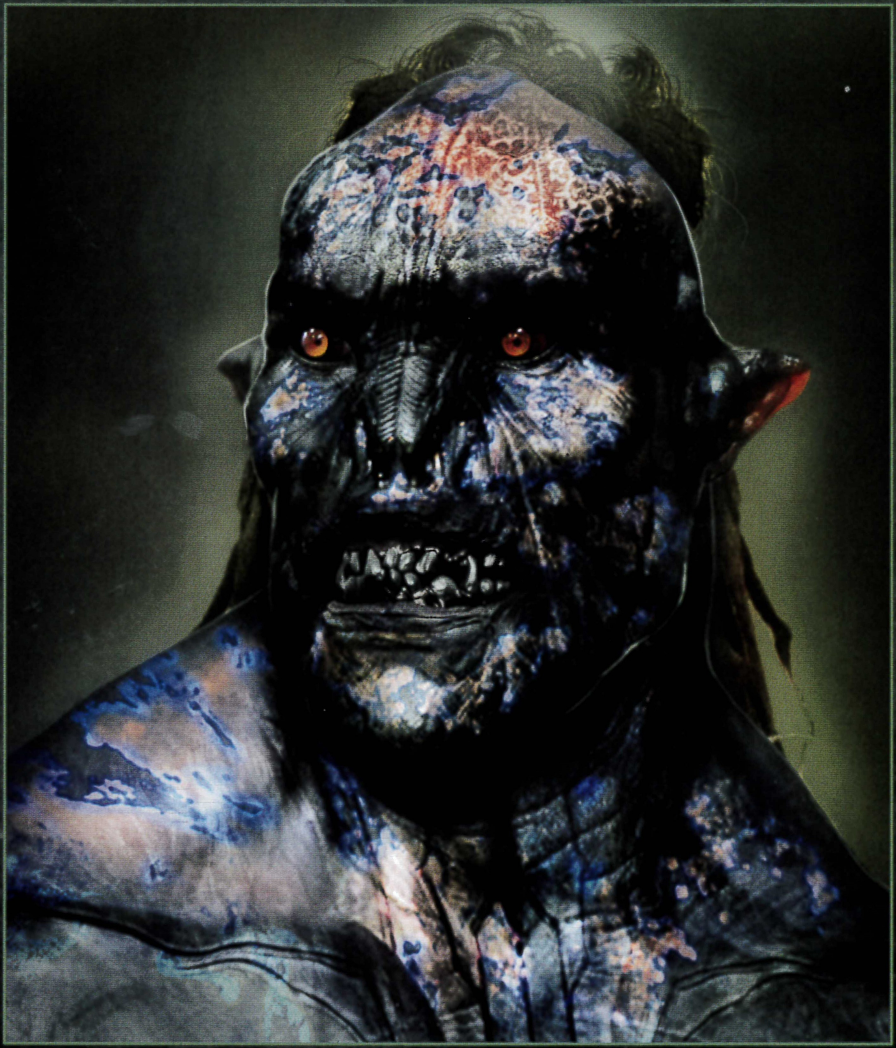
VILLAINS

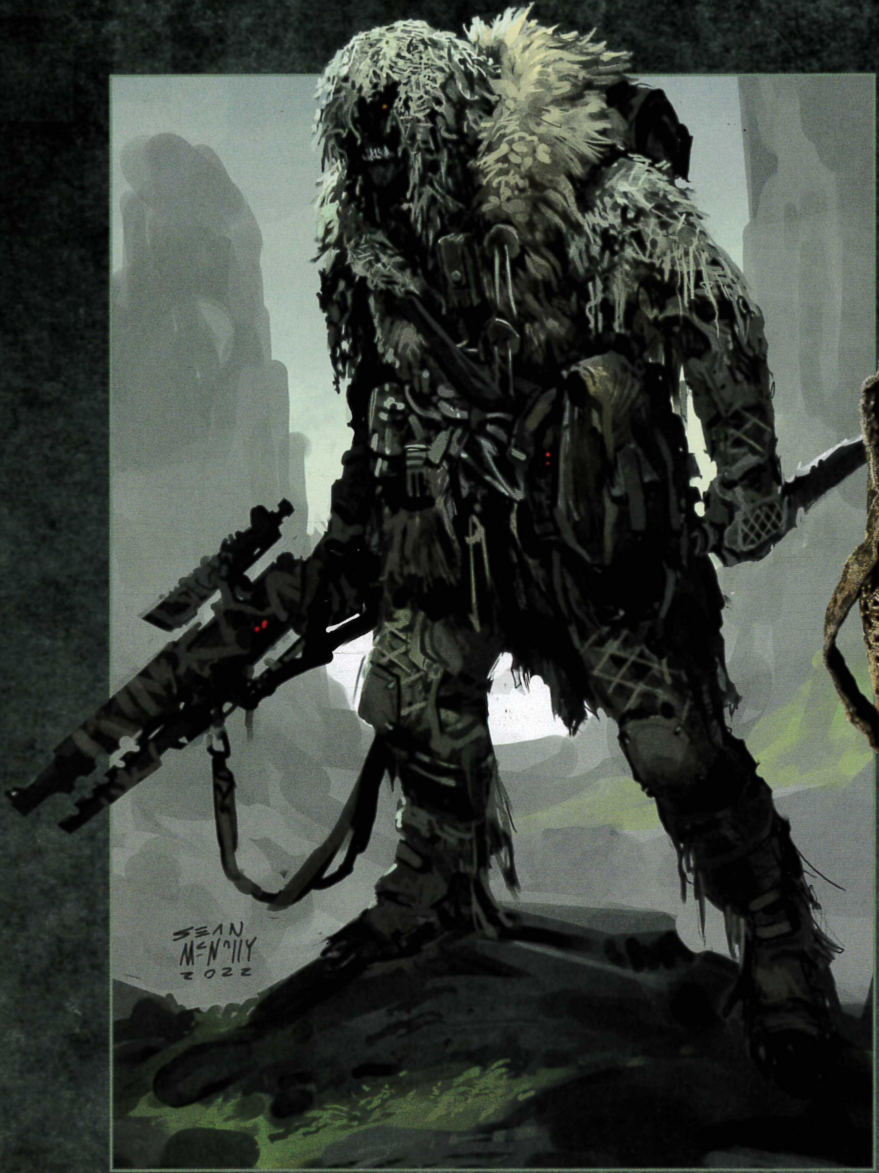
HAWKSHAWS

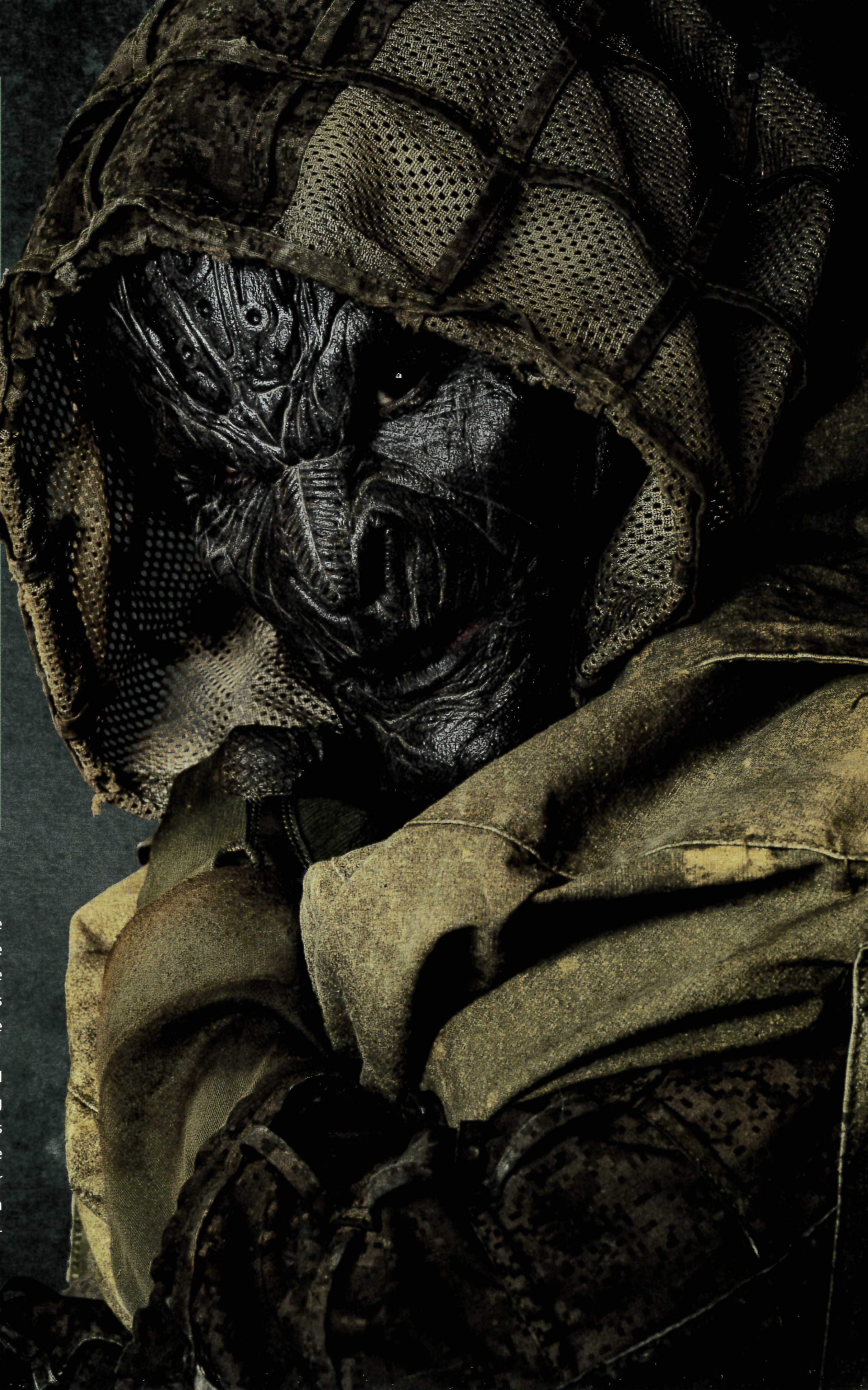
SIMILAR TO THE WAY THE KRYPTEIANS found their niche as elite soldiers, the Hawkshaws have capitalized on their species' natural predatory abilities to become the most sought-after bounty hunters in the galaxy. "They're freelance. They have no formal agreement, really, with the Motherworld," Snyder says, "but the Motherworld pays the best, so they tend to work mostly for the Motherworld."

"Zack really wanted something a little orcish, in a way, maybe harken back a little to what we did in *Sucker Punch*," says makeup effects artist Justin Raleigh. "I think they were scripted as purple skinned, or something along those lines, and we shifted them to more of a black/gray, almost intrinsically camouflage. We ended up designing six individual, custom faces—a full head makeup. Because it was so black, we went foam rubber, which was helpful with all the action and the heat and everything that we were dealing with. It didn't make sense to do something that was heavy and translucent. We gave them different paint patterns, kind of a simian, gorilla-type paint pattern. They all

◄ A Hawkshaw (Derek Mears).







◀▲ Concept art for a Hawkshaw face and a Hawkshaw tracker outdoors.
▶ The Hawkshaw Streep (Raphael Corkhill) trying to blend in.

had dental veneers and contact lenses, as well. They all look like they're of the same tribe. It's already a stylized design, so we just created the overall anatomy for it and then let the person's face come through a little bit to create the uniqueness in each one of them. We created variants between them through some different hairstyles, like a bit of a Japanese samurai top-knot sort of vibe."

The Hawkshaws also needed clothing that allowed them to blend into the background, wherever they might be. "When they were spying on the village, they needed to look almost like feral animals," says costume designer Stephanie Portnoy Porter, "and so, we put fur on the backs of their necks, and we modified some ghillie suits and added fur and hair. Then when they're in disguise in Providence, we've given them these ponchos that are from some Eastern European former Soviet-Bloc country. We painted and aged and rusted and added some subtle Motherworld stencil work."

VILLAINS

KAI

A SPACE-FARING TRADER/SMUGGLER who is instrumental in Kora and Gunnar rounding up their ragtag gang of heroes, Kai is described by Zack Snyder as, "Kind of a rogue. He's good in a fight. He's looking for any opportunities that might arise. A problem solver—let's put it that way." He also could have added that he's a money-grubbing backstabber who can't be trusted, but that's something Kora and the audience need to discover on their own.

English actor Charlie Hunnam (*Sons of Anarchy*, *King Arthur: Legend of the Sword*), however, would have us believe that his character Kai's goal wasn't always betrayal. "He is somebody who follows adventure and is a bit of an adrenaline junkie," Hunnam explains. "I think a part of Kai's initial motivation is that he's attracted to Kora both physically and in spirit. Ultimately, his greed gets the better of him. He starts to realize the value of what he's involved in, and that if he were to go against them, as opposed to stay with them, that could be exponentially more valuable to him."

▲Kai knows how to move goods.

▲Kai shows off his hardware.

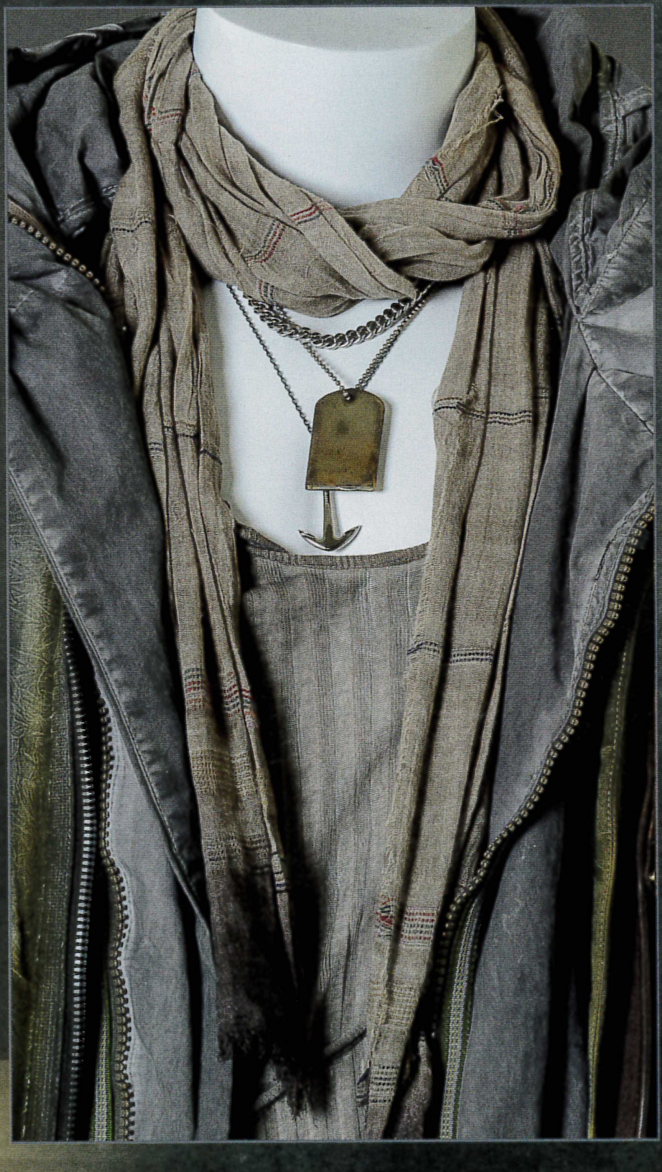
Still, there are moments where Kai's bonds with this group of foundlings—especially with Kora—are growing, and betrayal seems unimaginable. "I really like the scenes where I get to interact with Sofia and touch on the 'will they, won't they' potential of some romance blooming between them," Hunnam says. "That's one of the central functions of this character for me. What's developed between these other characters and Kai feels deep and significant, so all of that informed what that betrayal felt like. It wasn't simply a moment of victory for Kai, that he managed to trick them the way he had. It felt much more complicated and filled with regret and uncertainty about whether it was the right thing to do."

Hunnam wrestled with Kai's ability to do what he did, digging deeply into what the story was really about and Kai's place in it. "It seemed to me that it was a lot about picking sides and standing for something," he explains. "Once I identified that as an overall theme of the film, it became clear that the function of Kai is that he's actually the only person in this world that Zack's created who refuses to pick a side. That told me a huge amount." Hunnam decided that Kai's slippery nature ultimately stemmed from trauma inflicted on him by the Motherworld. "His planet got destroyed, and he had to make a choice: Do I stay and fight and get killed, or do I use this ability I have and escape? He chose a lonely, self-serving lifestyle,

as opposed to standing in solidarity," the actor says.

Once he had a good handle on where Kai was coming from, Hunnam went to work on the characterization. He drew inspiration from several sources, some more surprising than others. "I started thinking a lot about Northern Ireland—which is how I arrived at this idea of playing Kai with a Northern Irish dialect—because there were a lot of people obviously caught up in The Troubles who found themselves in a really difficult position of having to pick sides, and maybe not even really believing in the ethos or the doctrine of either side," he says. For Kai's distinctive personal style, Hunnam looked to English and Irish Traveler culture. "I felt like that nomadic culture spoke to a little bit of who Kai was and how he operates. He's sort of a law unto himself, and will traverse all sides knowing that ultimately he's only ever on his own side," he explains. This influence came through particularly in all the jewelry and the platinum-grill dental work he sports. "You definitely get the sense that his appearance matters to him. He's got his own flavor," Hunnam muses.

Finally, much like Kora and her connection to the wolf, Hunnam saw Kai as an amalgam of two animals: monkey and coyote. "I was in Costa Rica a few years ago, and there were these two monkeys that came out onto the beach," he recalls. "One of them put on a whole show, doing backflips and doing handstands. Everybody was enthralled. Then there was this moment where everyone realized its pal was rifling through everyone's backpacks, stealing all the food. That made me think: 'This guy is a monkey.'" As for the sly coyote, that side comes out when he pivots to sell Kora and her crew out. "I go hiking next to my house every morning really early, so I see coyotes every day. So, I've got the coyote down. I know what the coyote is about," he says.



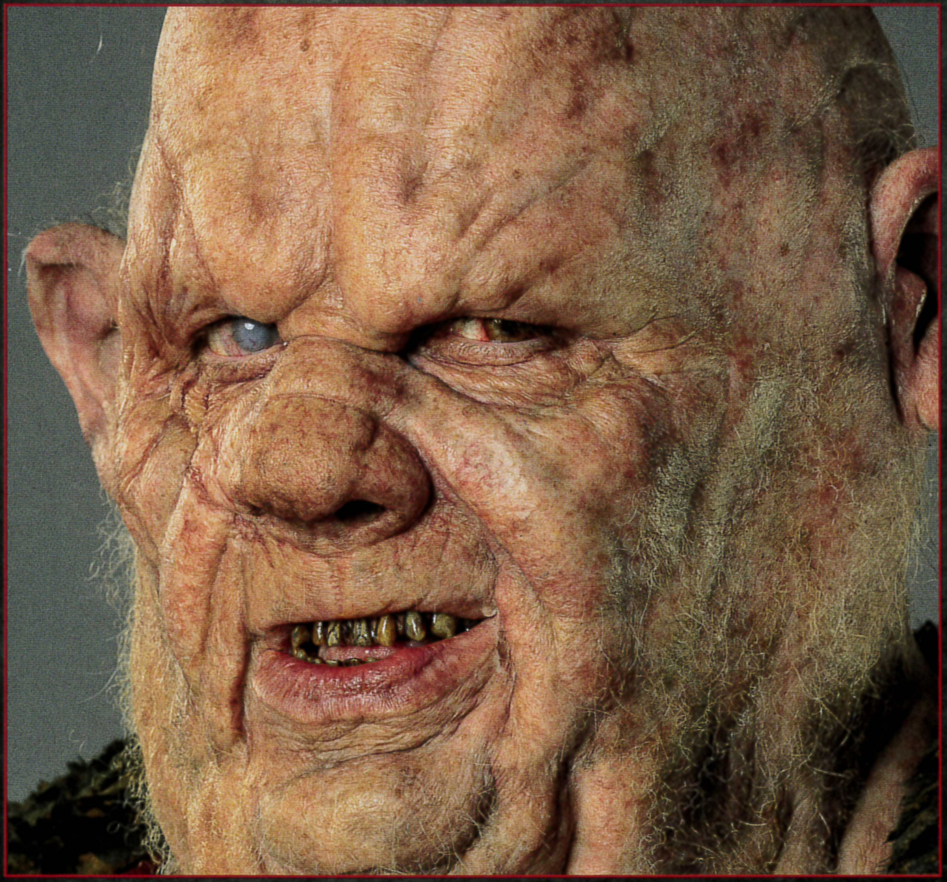
◀ Kai lets Kora persuade him to join her fight.

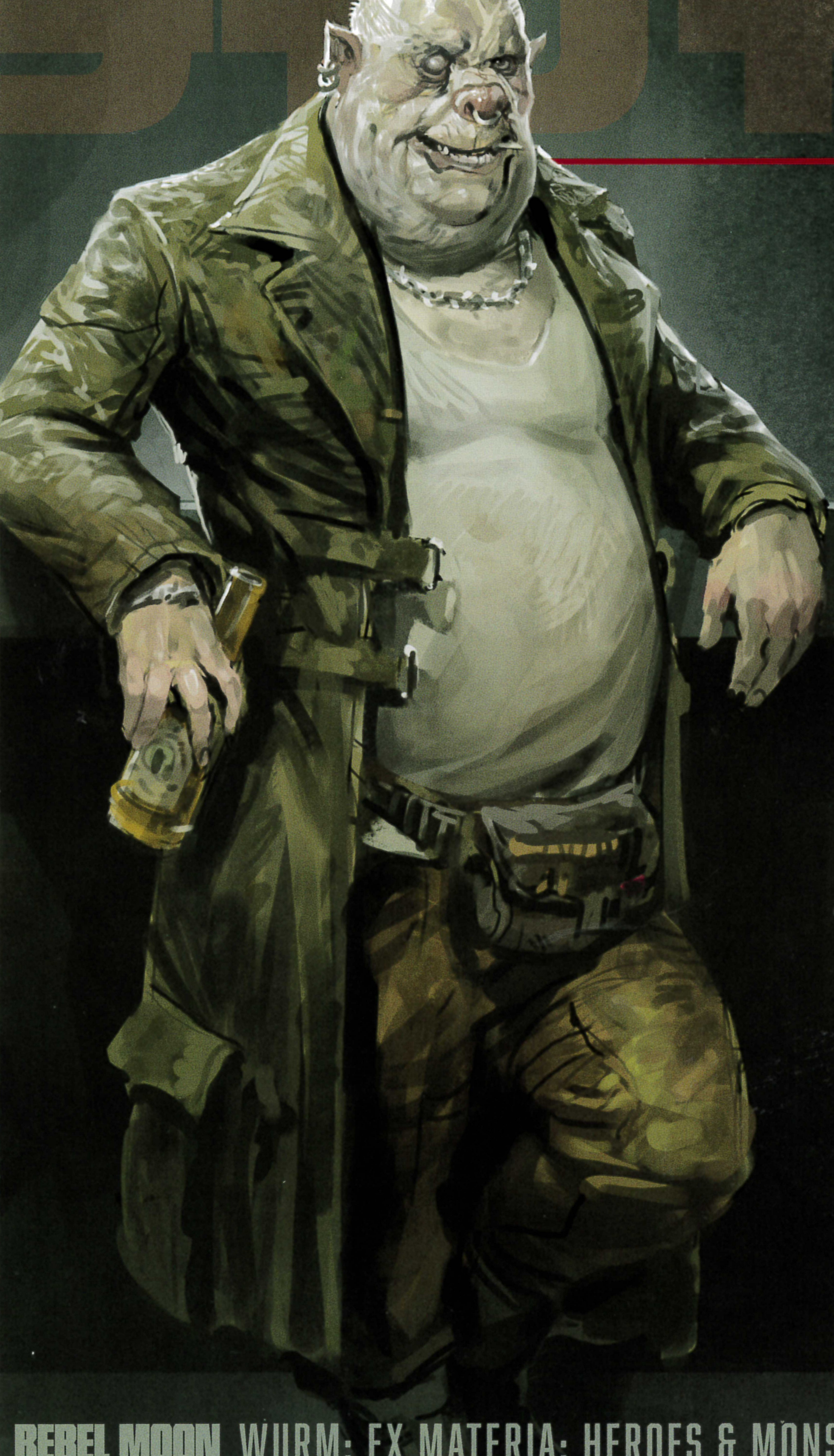
VILLAINS

DASH THIF

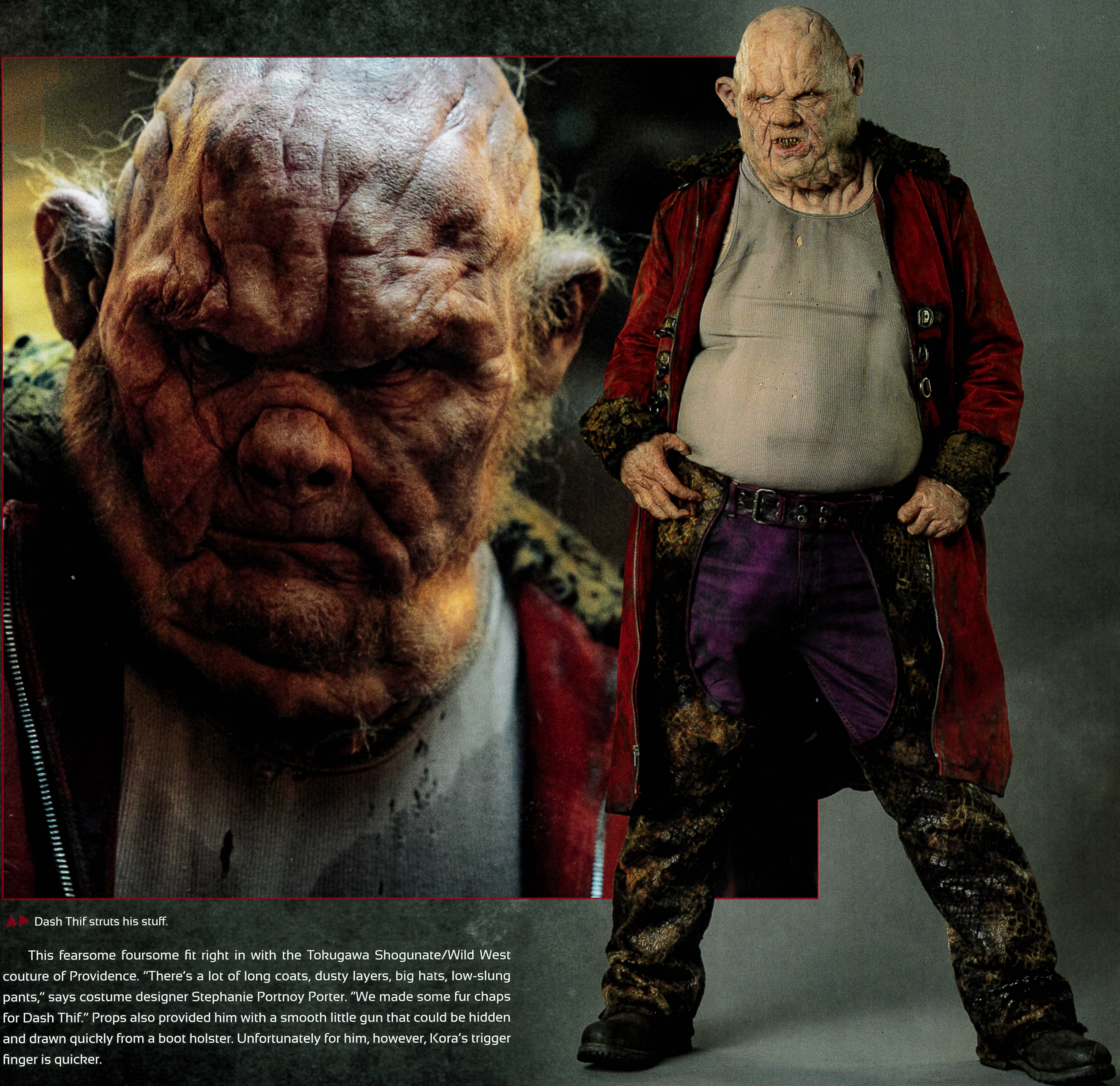
WITH A FACE LIKE A BULLDOG and a raging libido, thickly built Dash Thif makes things uncomfortable for Gunnar when he accompanies Kora to the Crown City Emporium of Pleasure in search of resistance heroes. Dash Thif's aggressive approach eventually leads to a confrontation with Kora (because, let's face it, Gunnar isn't up to the job, just yet), which he later escalates by bringing three of his cronies into the mix.

"This is a fun character. Zack sent me a bunch of images he had put together. The idea was to describe this ugly, pug-faced kind of guy, and I used that as a kickoff point," recalls makeup effects artist and creature designer Justin Raleigh. "I sculpted that makeup, and then had one of my artists finish all the final detail to it. It's a full silicone cowl with punched hair. He has six facial appliances that sit on top of big dental veneers and contact lenses—one is dead, one is a dog-type eye. It's a really big, heavy, kind of hairless, semi-mangy-looking pug or something. [We were] making him look as seedy and as gross and as dirty as possible. Jokingly, we called him 'Candy' for a little while, because of John Candy's character from *Spaceballs*. Dominic [Burgess], who played him, was just brilliant. He did such a great job with that character."





Concept of Dash Thif.



▲▶ Dash Thif struts his stuff.

This fearsome foursome fit right in with the Tokugawa Shogunate/Wild West couture of Providence. "There's a lot of long coats, dusty layers, big hats, low-slung pants," says costume designer Stephanie Portnoy Porter. "We made some fur chaps for Dash Thif." Props also provided him with a smooth little gun that could be hidden and drawn quickly from a boot holster. Unfortunately for him, however, Kora's trigger finger is quicker.

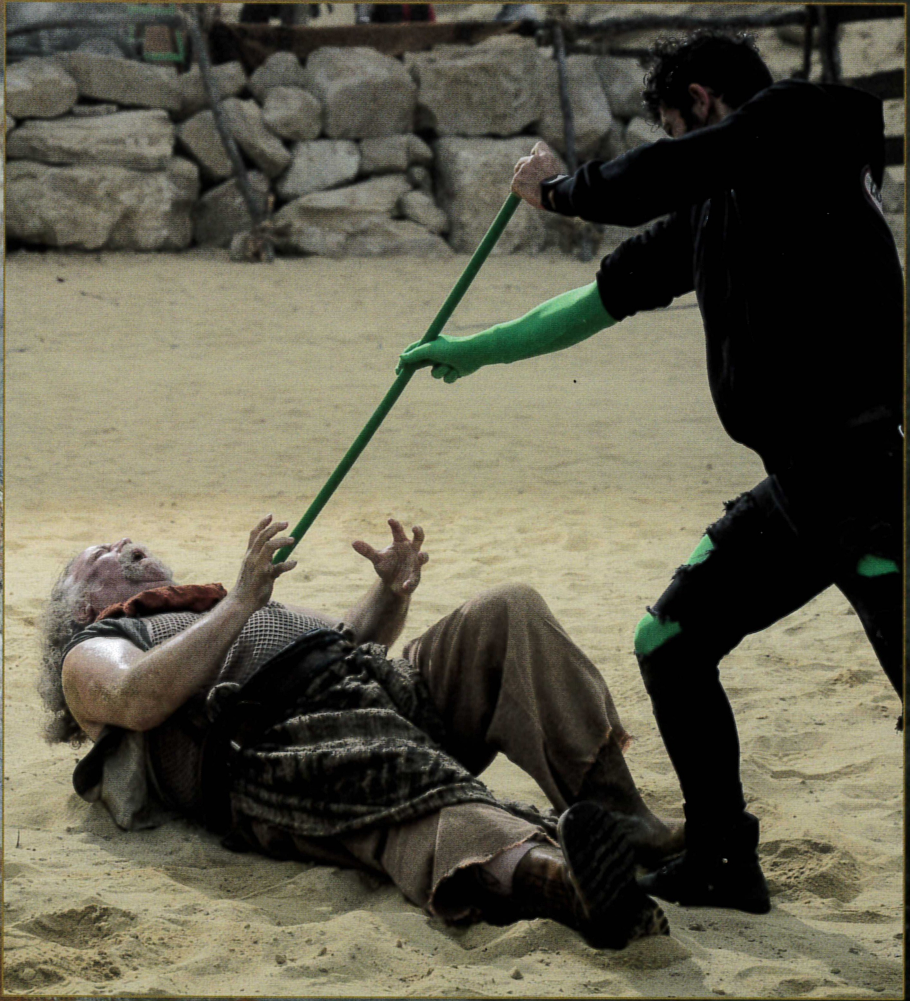
VILLAINS

HICKMAN

KNOWN BY MANY for his portrayal of Darkseid in *Zack Snyder's Justice League*, Ray Porter plays the crooked rancher on Neu-Wodi who keeps Tarak as a slave to pay off a debt. Not realizing the disgraced prince's connection with the beast, Hickman has Tarak break his newly acquired bennu as the price of his release. This miscalculation ends up biting Hickman in the, well, everywhere.

The design and layout of the ranch set were intended specifically to highlight Hickman as a recent interloper in this world, along with Tarak's aspirations. For example, the exposed beams and sculptural elements of jagged wood contrasted with the earthy, colorful smoothness of the native adobe construction. Additionally, says production designer Stephen Swain "Within Tarak's workshop there was a large opening looking out into the corral. This was important for the story, because it allowed Tarak to be continually reminded of his own internment and the freedom he seeks."

▼▶ Hickman (Ray Porter) attempts to ride the green-screen bennu, with fatal results.



THE ROYAL FAMILY

▲▲ The royal family pose for a portrait.

▶ The Queen (Rhian Rees) and King listen to Balisarius speak in the Senate.

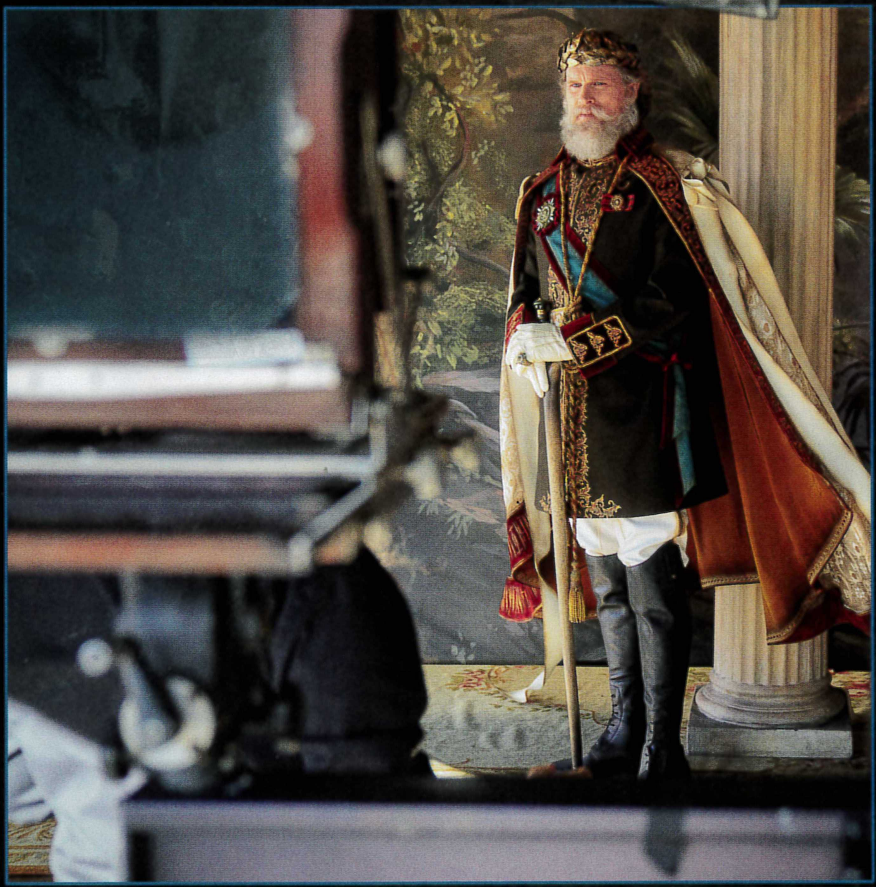
▶▶ Snyder checks with artist Stephen Berkman on the progress of glass-plate photographs Berkman took for the production.

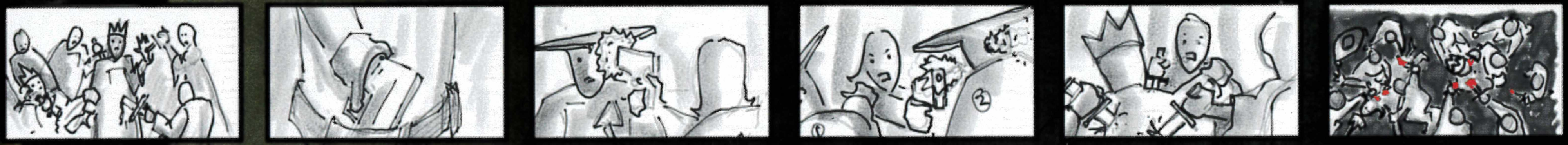
THE ROYAL FAMILY

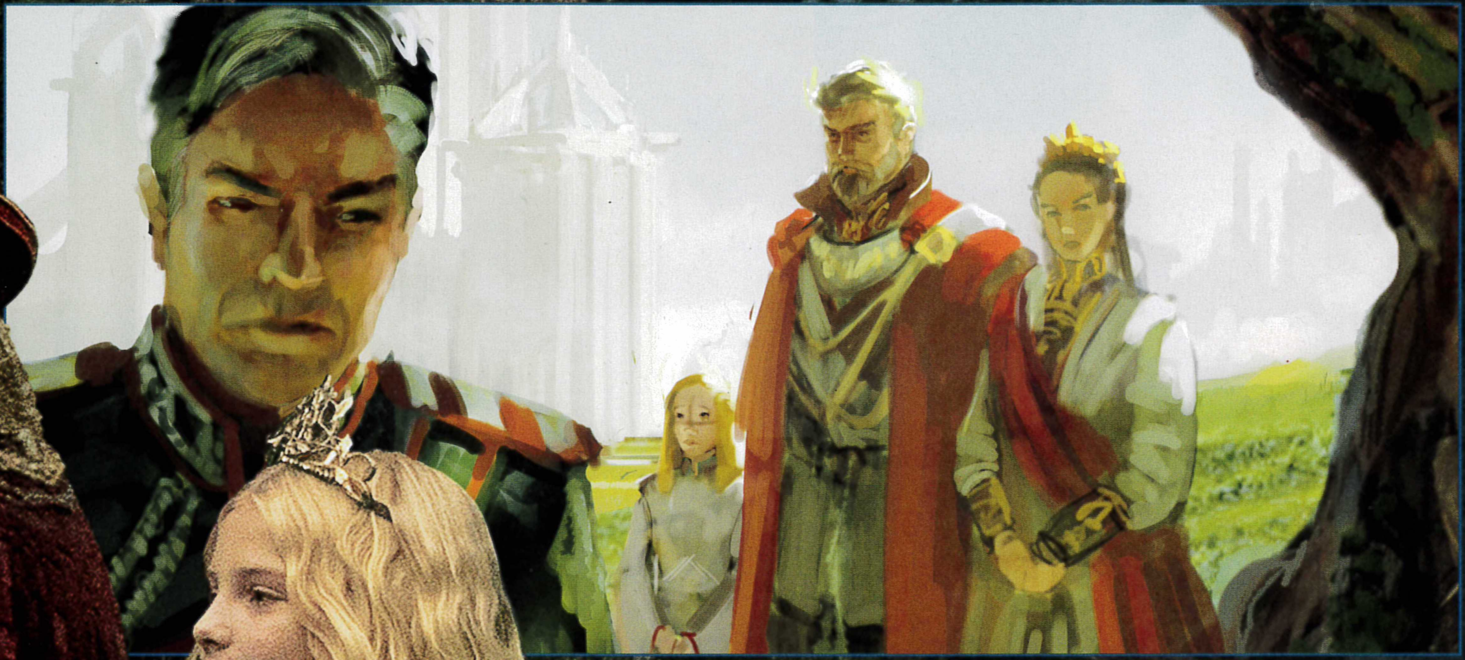
THE SLAIN KING & QUEEN

NO STRANGER TO THE TRAPPINGS OF ROYALTY,

Cary Elwes (*The Princess Bride, Robin Hood: Men in Tights*) lends his skill and presence to the role of the last King of the Realm. "I've always been a huge fan of his," Snyder says of the actor. "I was excited that he would do it." Rhian Rees (*Halloween*, 2018) plays the Queen, doomed to be assassinated with her King. "She did an amazing audition. I had to convince her to do it, because, you know, it's a pretty small role. But in our plan, there's the promise of more Queen coming in more flashbacks and more side stories," Snyder explains. "Those two, I thought, made a really great royal couple. Both incredibly great actors bringing a level of depth to what you would consider a small amount of screen time."



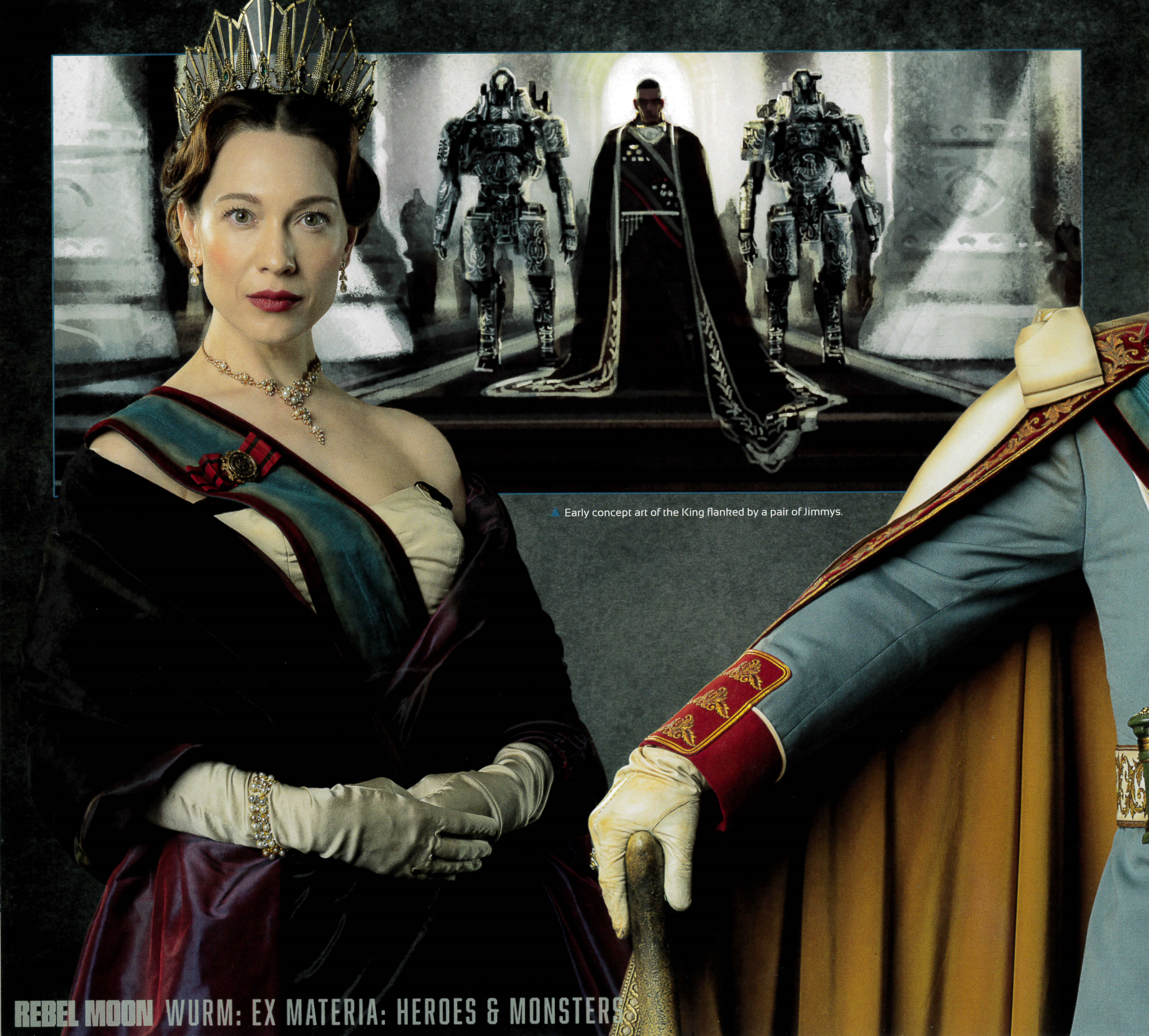




The King, Queen, and Princess Issa (Stella Grace Fitzgerald) meet with foreign dignitaries.

Concept for the country palace gardens.

Like every other design detail to be seen in *Rebel Moon*, the wardrobe of the royal family is meant to tell a story and is rich in visual symbolism. "From an appreciation perspective, I'm a huge fan of the mid-century New Look of the late forties to the early fifties—sculptural, hard, sharp. There were some specific moments in that period of time that I wanted to emulate, so people who know fashion history can say, 'That was Charles James, or Christian Dior, or Balenciaga,'" costume designer Stephanie Portnoy Porter says. "For the Queen, most of her stuff was done in duchesse satin, which is a very sturdy, strong, sculptural silk with a reflective sheen. Then we took it down and sanded seams and gave it a little bit of sun fading and threadbare. So, it's all of these really regal, dramatic shapes, but if you look closer, it's fraying a little bit. With the King, we went further back in terms of our frame of reference period, more like 1900 through 1920. The shapes of his jacket were similar to the shapes of the uniforms of the Motherworld officers, but of course were made out of different fabrics. We added 'embroidery,' which was actually three-dimensional silk screening with foil on top of it, so it would look like military gold bullion embroidery. All of the decorations on it were our motifs that we created as part of the filigree on the armor, so it all runs with that same aesthetic language. We looked a lot at Nicholas II, the last Romanov Tsar of Russia. Just over the top with the embellishments and the regalia and the gold, from that last period of Imperial Russia, before the Bolsheviks."



Early concept art of the King flanked by a pair of Jimmys.

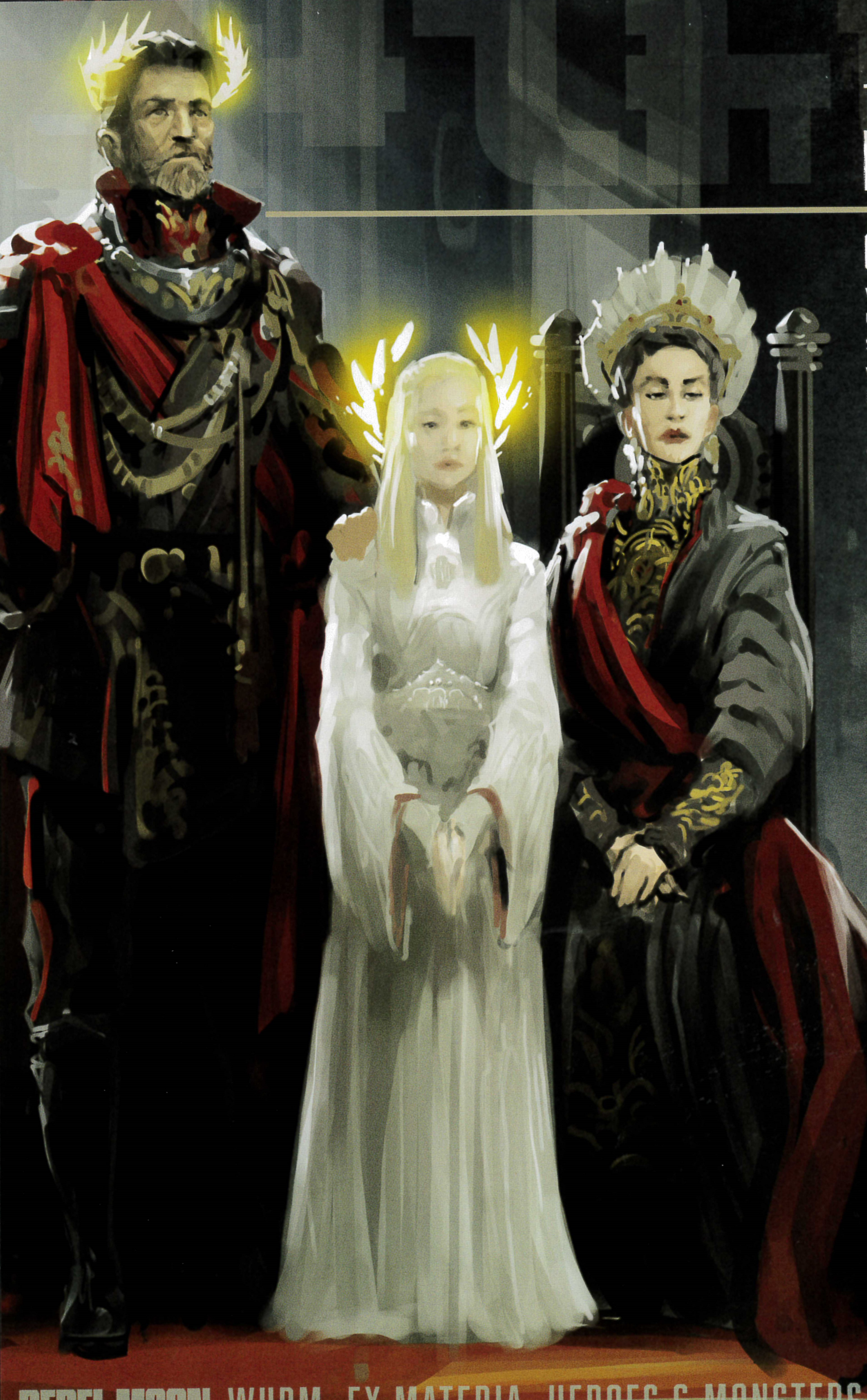
Balisarius slays the King.

THE ROYAL FAMILY

PRINCESS ISSA

COULD SHE BE THE QUEEN Issa of legend reborn? The Child of Light who will set all things right? Such was the hope of many in the Realm before the slaughter of the royal family ended that dream. These would be very large mythological shoes for any girl to fill, but Snyder had every confidence that Stella Grace Fitzgerald (*Mrs. Davis*) was the one who could do it. "We were on a search for someone who could embody this 'Magic Princess' vibe, and I felt like she was able to pull it off," he says.

"With the Princess, I wanted to contrast with the 1950s, idealized feminine look of the Queen by keeping it relatively in the same timeframe, but with a different approach," Portnoy Porter recalls. "There was a French designer named Madame Grès, who did these beautiful, draped, very Greco-Roman, classical pieces. The pooling of these lighter, flowing, more translucent fabrics seemed to suit the Princess. It just seemed softer. I also wanted to try to make it look as if light was emanating from her. Her dress that she dies in has a gold under-layer, and then with the organza, which is a sheer fabric, the warp is one color, and the weft is another color, this lavender and gray. The gold pushed through it and creates a new color, looking yellow-pink.

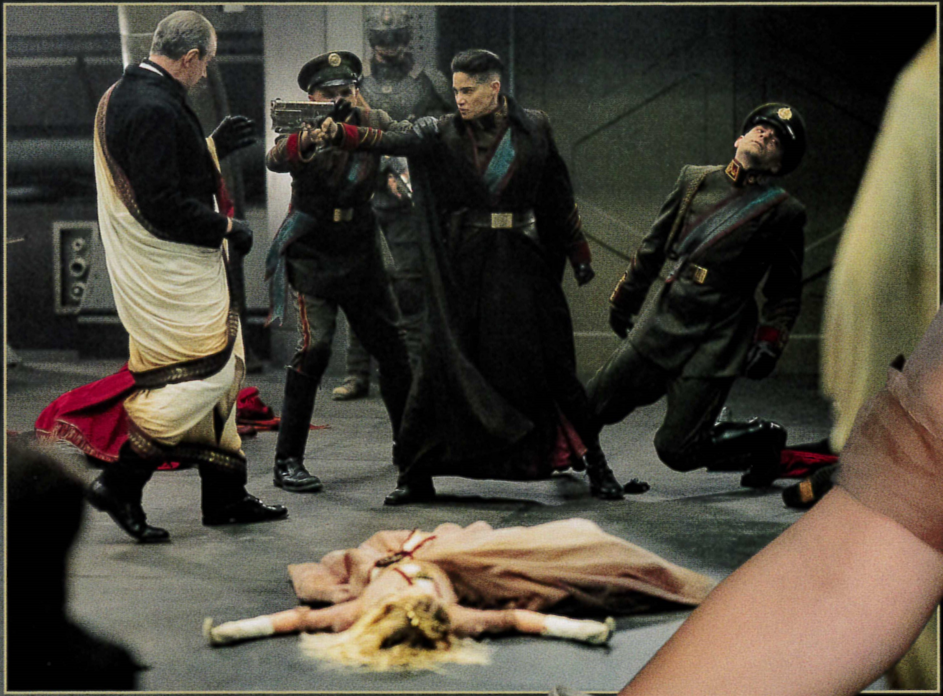


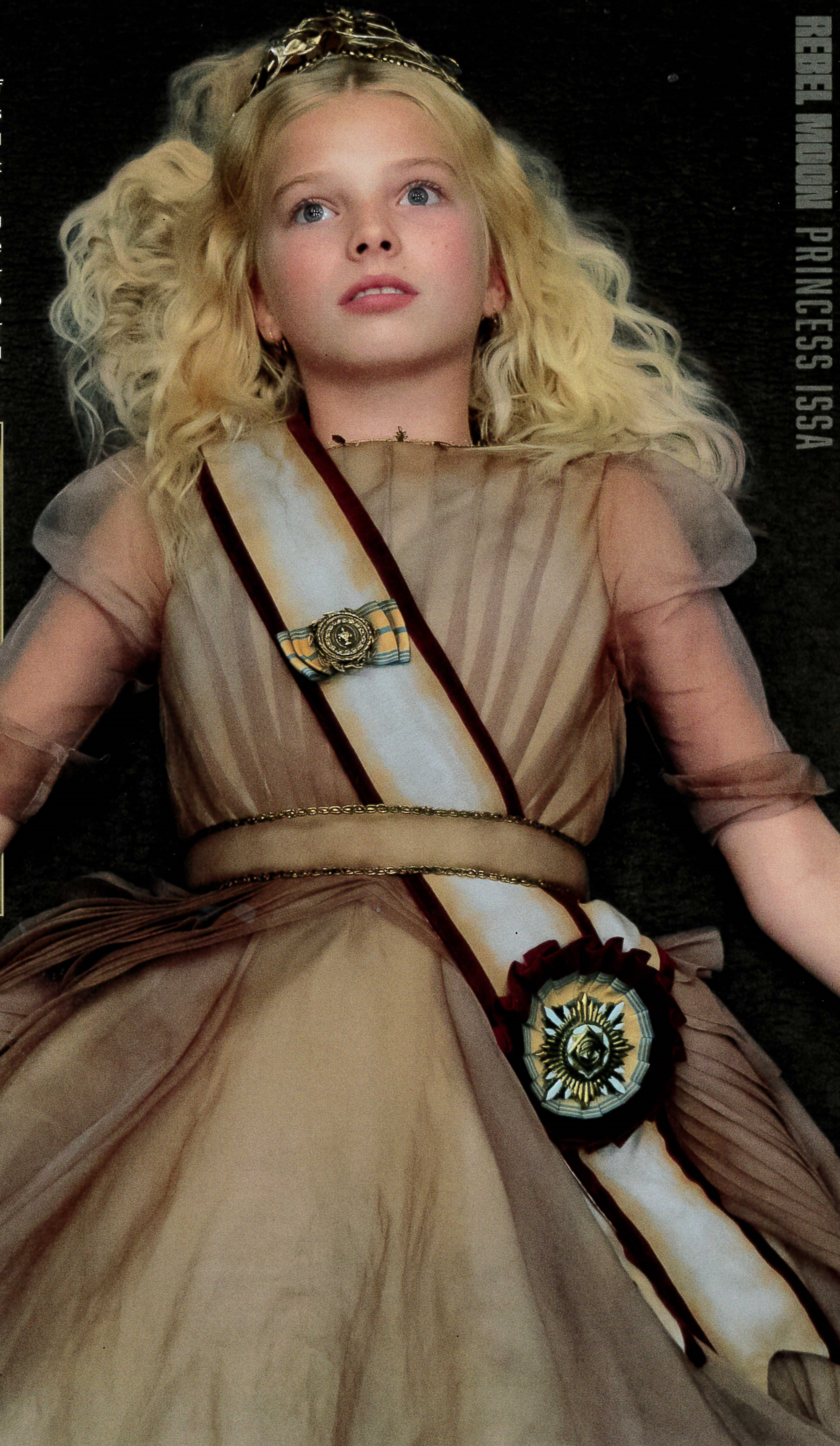
◄ Concept for the royal family.

▲▼ The royal family visits a dreadnought under construction.

"Her other dress that she wears in the garden was still structured, but with lots of classic draping. It was this really, really, really sheer silk jersey, but it was a million yards of it, which we had Fortuny pleated. We wound up dyeing it the palest of pale blues, and then behind it was an electric turquoise. It looked like the sky in the morning, this light emanating from the blue sky."

The end result is that the Princess appears to be a ray of hope and serenity shining out amid the excesses of the last days of the monarchy. "Zack talked about what the Motherworld was like, the history and the mythology. This family has been ruling for generations, and the corruption, and the absolute power, and the greed, it creeps up more and more until there's a moral reset. In the overarching frame of reference for the Motherworld aesthetic—lavish, over the top—the Princess is the more ethereal and classical reset button, but still trying to live within that world," Portnoy Porter says.





◀▲▶ The betrayal of the royal family by senators—and the princess's bodyguard, Arthelais.

THEMES

BLACK WOLF & WHITE WURM: THE ORIGIN MYTH OF THE MOTHERWORLD

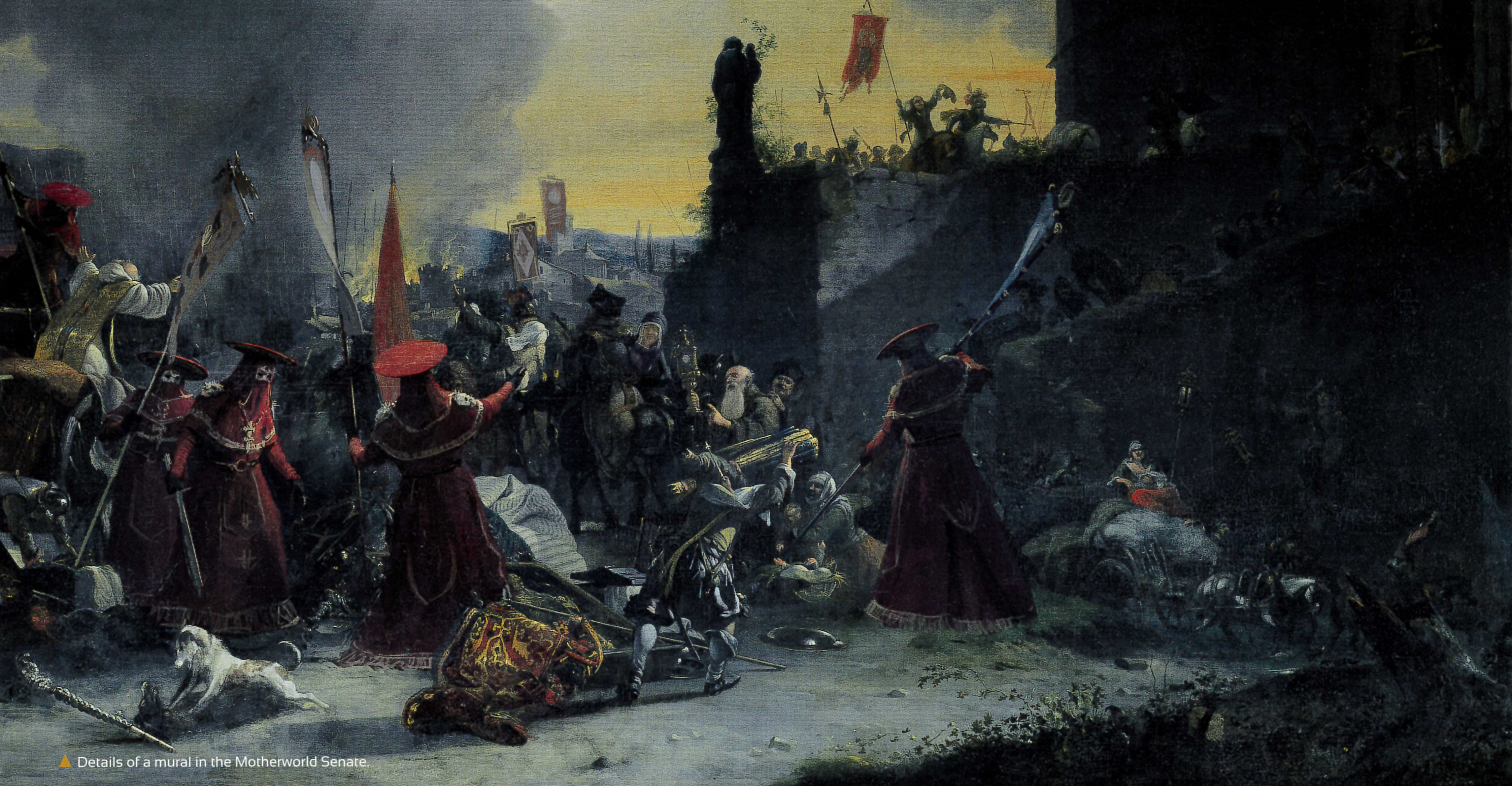
OUT OF THE NIGHT and while men slept in the darkness before time was, there was only the God-Cursed Wolf, mother of monolithic oblivion, the shadow-borne hunger that hunted and devoured all but the Abyss, and who knew no boundary, beginning or end.

However, deep within the cruel Wolf a malignant debt grew, for the cost of her hate-honed hunting demanded a price, and the account's searing ember grew within the cursed creature, foretelling the reckoning that was to come.

And as troubled time continued, so the debt grew. No longer able to hunt, the woeful Wolf twisted and turned in torment until she could no longer bear the hellfire in her belly, when she heaved a slithering brightness into the dark, waking the cosmos with a brilliant clarity, laying bare all distinctions of Earth and Sky and Fate's great intention for the Black Wolf and the White Wurm.

So, the Great Wurm awoke. Drawing its first mighty breath, aroused by form and maddened by blood, the burning beast seized the harrowed body of the Mother Wolf, penetrating her darkness with his bright and terrible tail, thus seeding our would-be world to be born unto itself, doomed by merciless time, bound by matter, and to be forged by the Will of Man.

Sobeit woe should never stop, Wolf and Wurm forever fettered in fragile condemnation, bound, broken, and moored again. Each to be hunted by the other, devoured, then reborn in the great cosmic churning of things. A deathless curse beyond the ken of Mercy.



▲ Details of a mural in the Motherworld Senate.

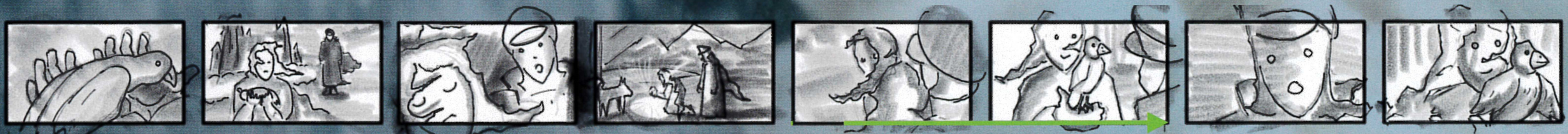
THEMES

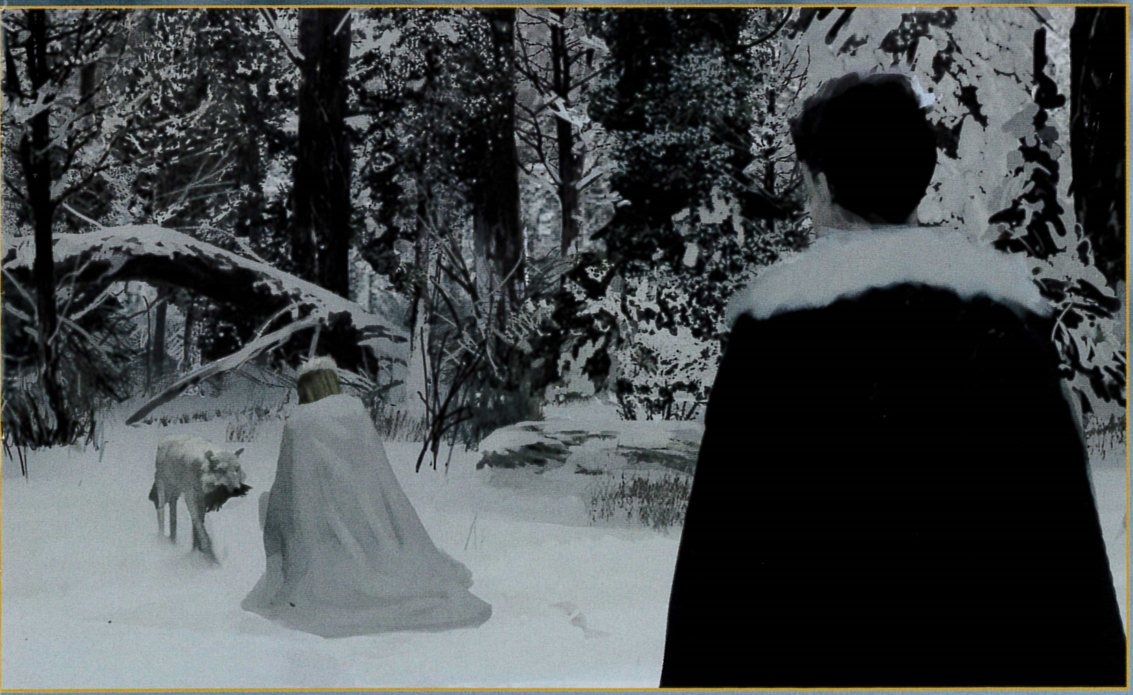
QUEEN ISSA THE LIFE GIVER

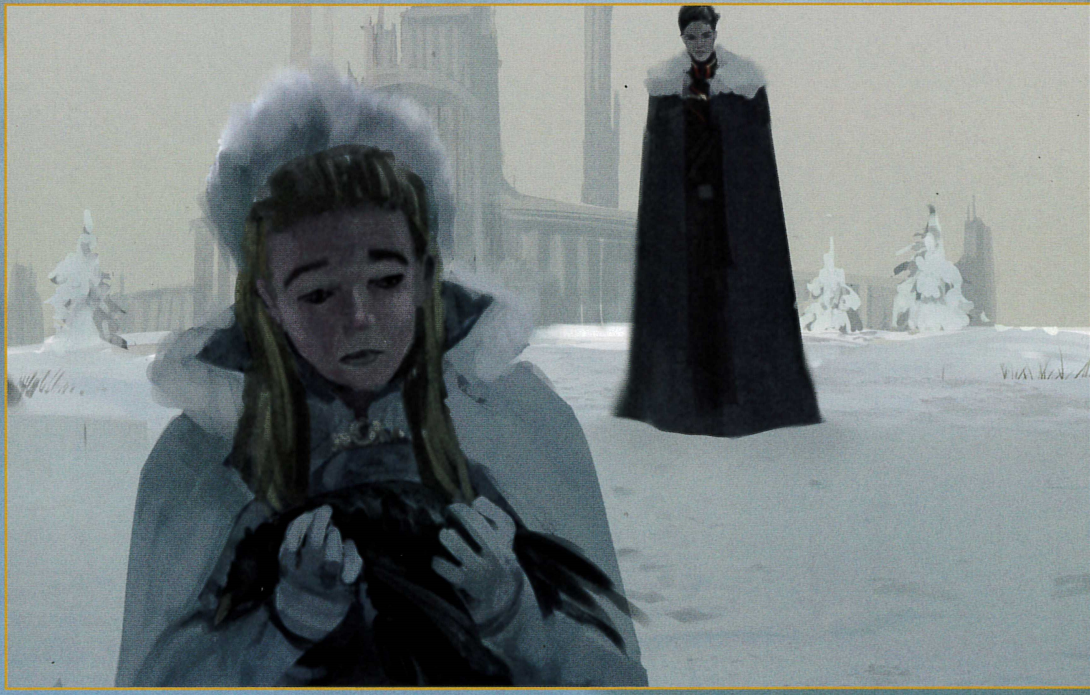
MILLENNIA AGO, it is said, there was a kind and gentle queen named Issa. Called by some the Life Giver, the people looked to her as a vessel of boundless Mercy and Redemption who could restore harmony to the Cosmos by rejoining her vitality with the flow of the source river. Many believe she even had the power to halt the eternal struggle between Wolf and Wurm; whether she did so and the cycle nevertheless began anew, or something prevented her entirely, it is not known. Certainly, suffering and tumult still reign wherever there are people.

The daughter of the Slain King was also named Issa, and some chose to see her as Queen Issa reborn. There are whispers referring to her as the Child of Light or the Pueri Salvatoris. To be sure, there have been reports of miraculous happenings connected with her both before and after her death. But the official stance of the Motherworld remains that these are baseless rumors and idle gossip born of pitiable grasps for hope where none exists.

▶▼ Concept art and filmed scenes of Princess Issa seemingly bringing a bird back to life.



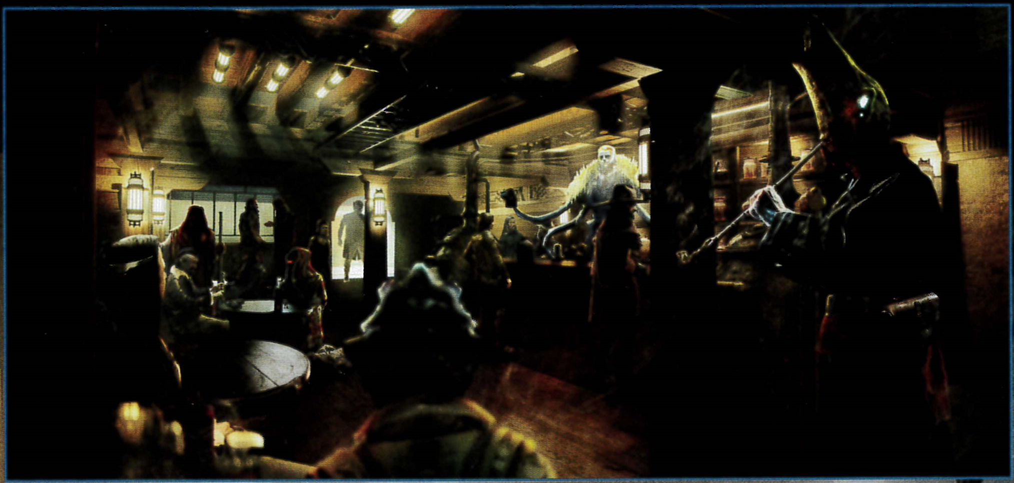




DENIZENS

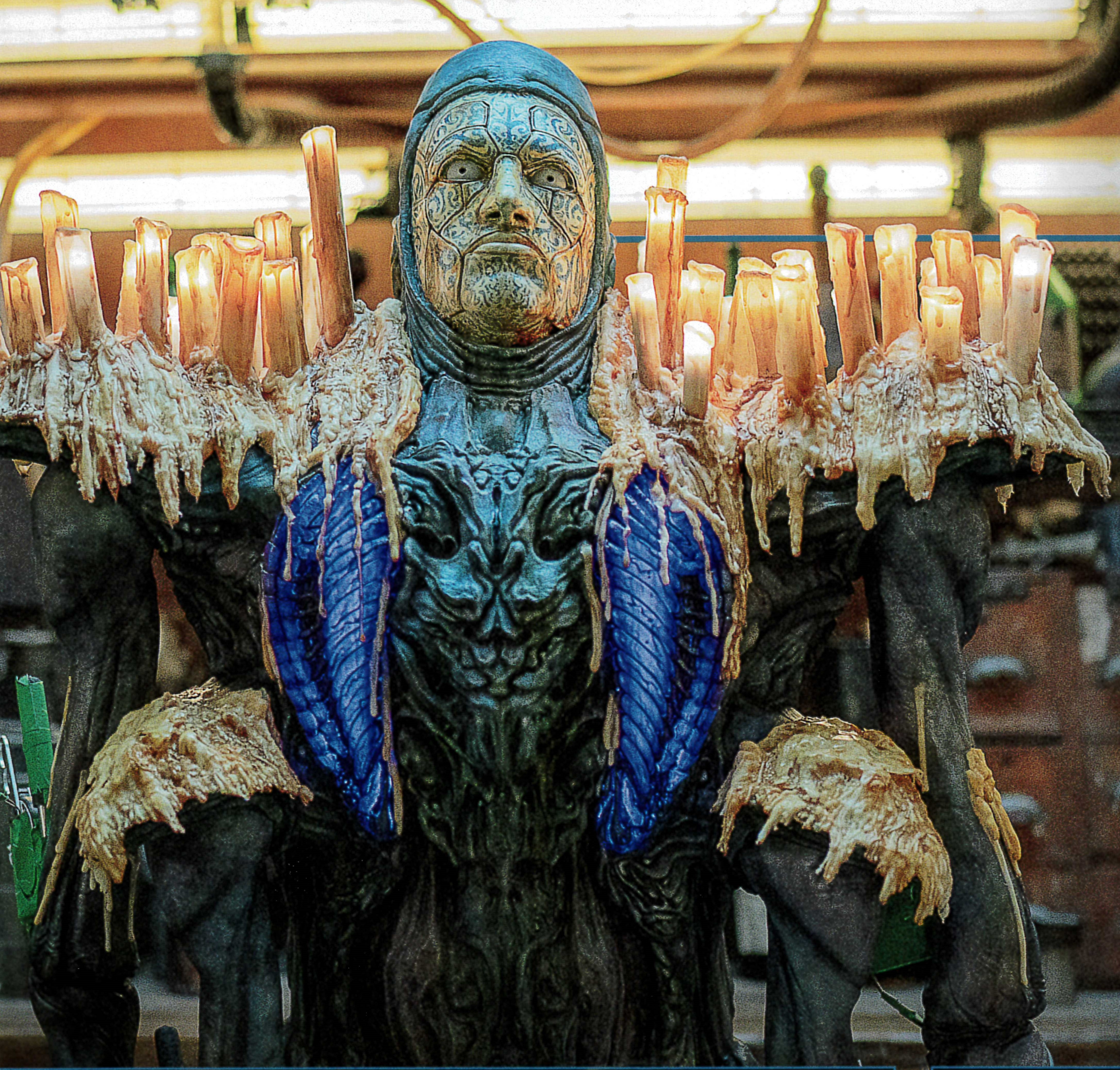
CROWN CITY EMPORIUM OF PLEASURE

"PROVIDENCE IS A JAPANESE VILLAGE meets an 1880s railroad town, with an element of ne'er-do-wells and criminals. Very lawless, like the showdown at the O.K. Corral. Providence is a place that you go to do things that maybe you wouldn't be proud to tell your parents about," says costume designer Portnoy Porter of the town where Kora and Gunnar go to seek help. At the Crown City Emporium of Pleasure, they run into some of the more colorful denizens of Providence, some of whom even have useful information.



◀ Michael Wayne James.

DENIZENS

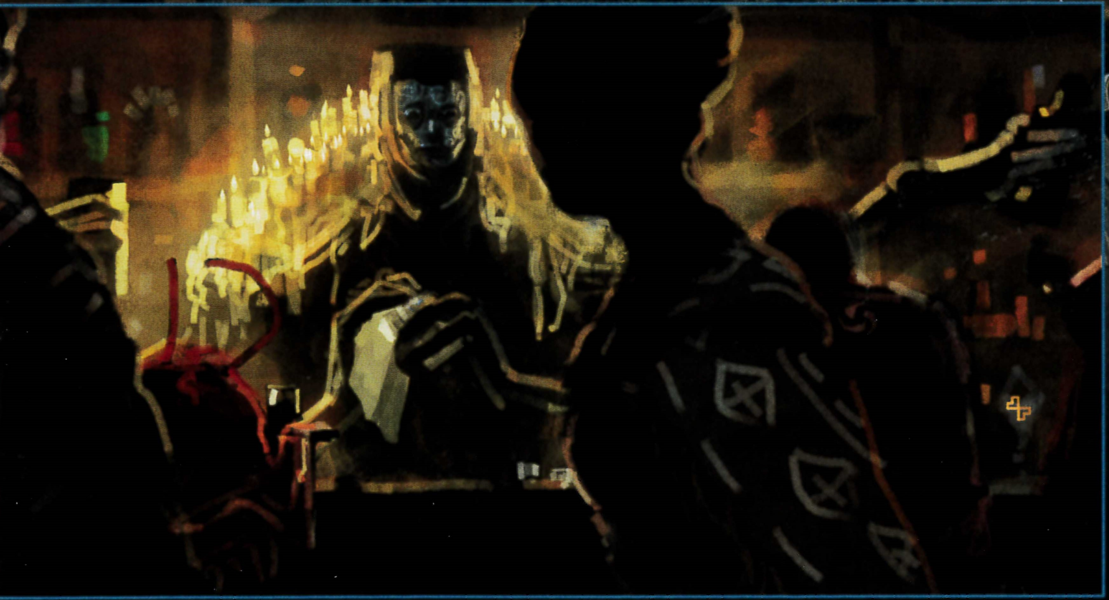


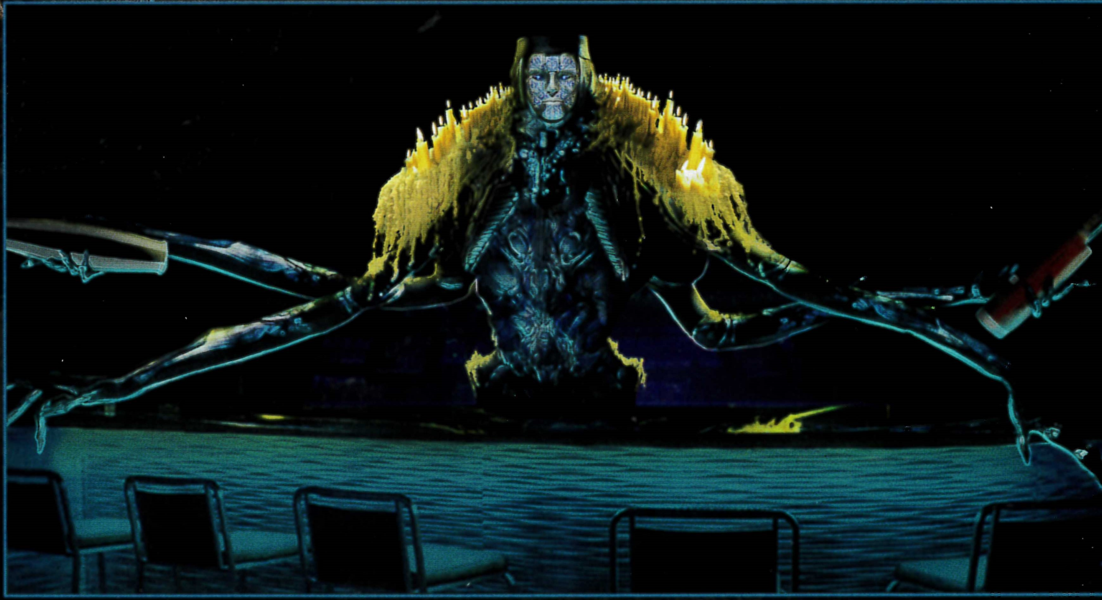
ROBOT BARTENDER

Whether you're looking to sample the local brews or something stronger, like carbost, this robotic bartender's got your poison. Built to an artisanal, watchmaker's aesthetic, he can serve several patrons at once and doesn't need tips. So, win-win. "The bartender is a combination of an animatronic, puppeteered character with an actor inside the suit. [For reference] Zack had sent me this really interesting, weird image. It was an illustration of a guy sitting in a bathtub with all these candles on his head. So, I took that he really liked that image, and then he just let me go crazy with the designs," says Raleigh. "We came up with these really long arms, so he can cover the whole bar himself; he doesn't need anyone else working there. You have Dustin Ceithamer, who plays Jimmy, inside the suit. He's got his own mouth movement—Zack wanted very much a marionette-style jaw—and this porcelain face with a pattern to it. Dustin controls the upper arms. You have two puppeteers on the bottom, controlling the bottom arms, and then an additional two puppeteers at the top helping control the wrists to pick up bottles. We also had some insert gloves so he could do really close-up shots and have a lot more articulation with the hands."

Ceithamer was thrilled to have the chance to bring yet another fanciful creature to life in *Rebel Moon*. "The first day I went to Fractured FX and saw the design of that, I was like, 'This is the coolest thing ever,'" he says.

◀ Dustin Ceithamer in full costume and prosthetics.
▼ Concepts for the robot bartender.

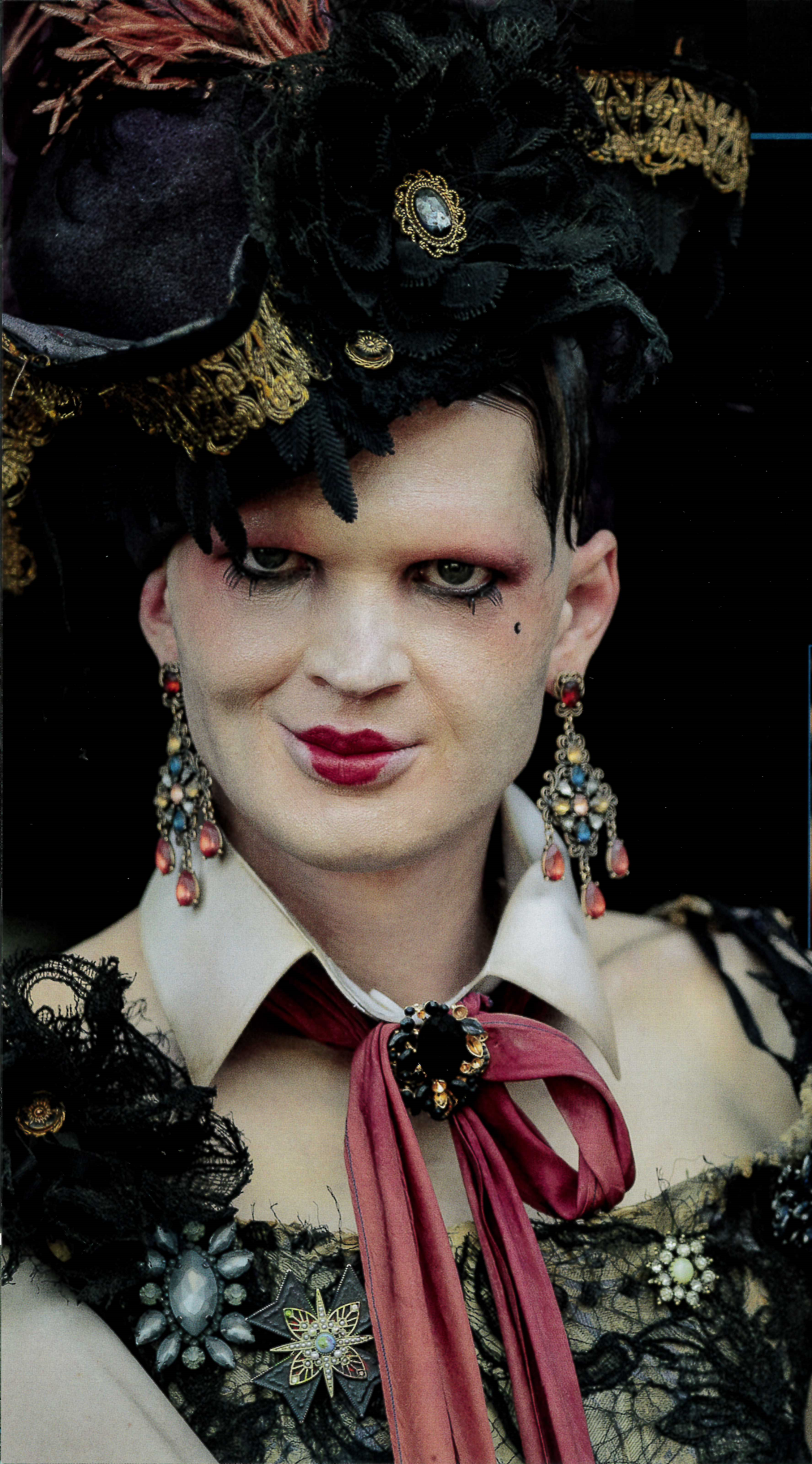




COURTESANS

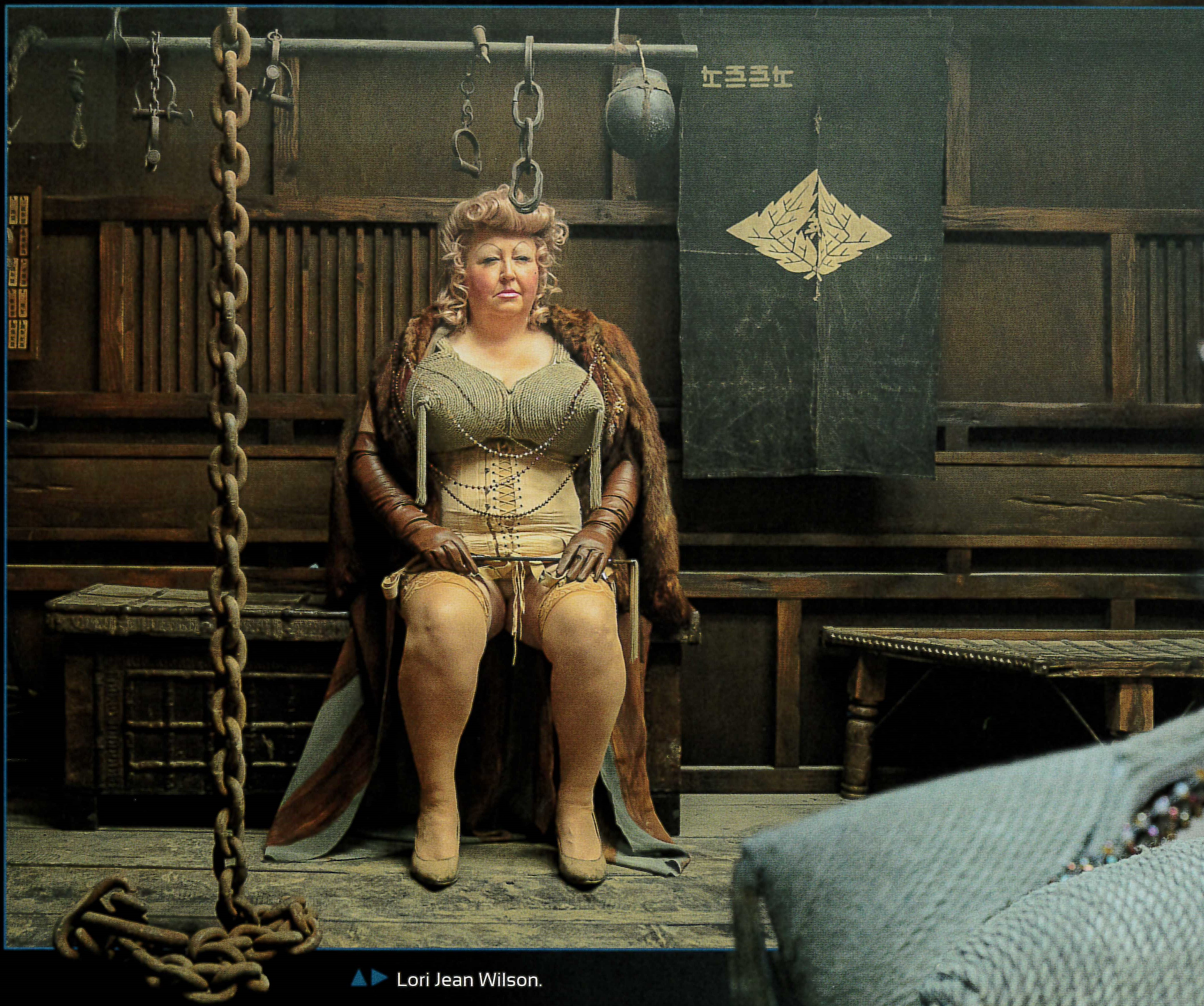
Providence was one of the bigger builds for Raleigh's makeup effects department due to the sheer number of aliens roaming the streets and hanging out in the Emporium. While some of these were full silicone pullover masks with minimal articulation—perfect for medium shots where they stayed in the background—several courtesans received extra special attention from makeup and wardrobe. "That was pretty fun to do," says Portnoy Porter. "My thought with them was to challenge what we consider traditionally attractive or alluring, because there are so many worlds, so many different people, different species... Who's to say that everybody is going to be attracted to exactly the same thing? I think it's being challenged now in our twenty-first century, so I wanted to push that as much as possible on a bigger scale. Everyone that participated as a courtesan was super into it. It was really important to stay body positive and sex positive, and we didn't want anybody to feel uncomfortable. We wanted people to use it as an opportunity to live out personal fantasies. We really had a lot of fun with it."

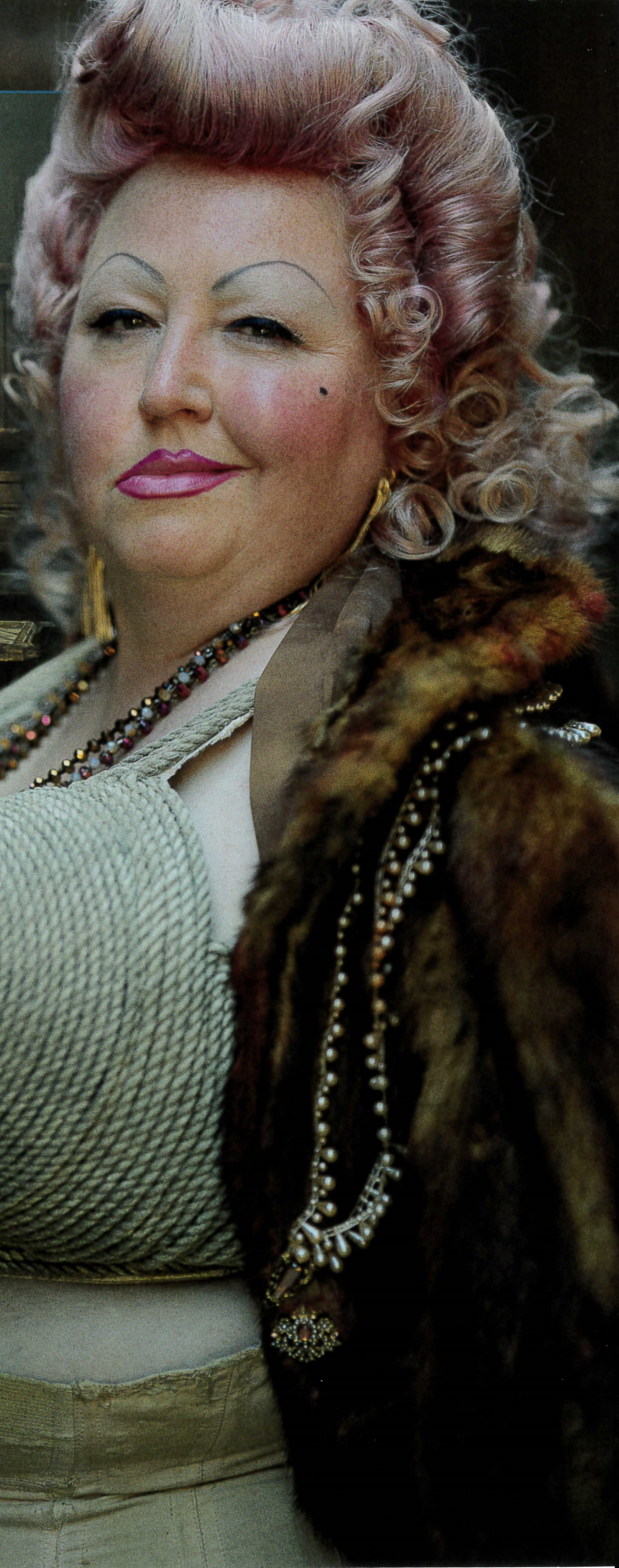
"We have the one who is all black, and she's got the helmet—you never see her face. We call her our 'Daft Punk girl,'" says Raleigh. "We body painted her black, then put gold-leaf tattoo transfers on top of the black to create those beautiful patterns that are going



◀ Kyle Samples.

▲ Joshua Longshore.



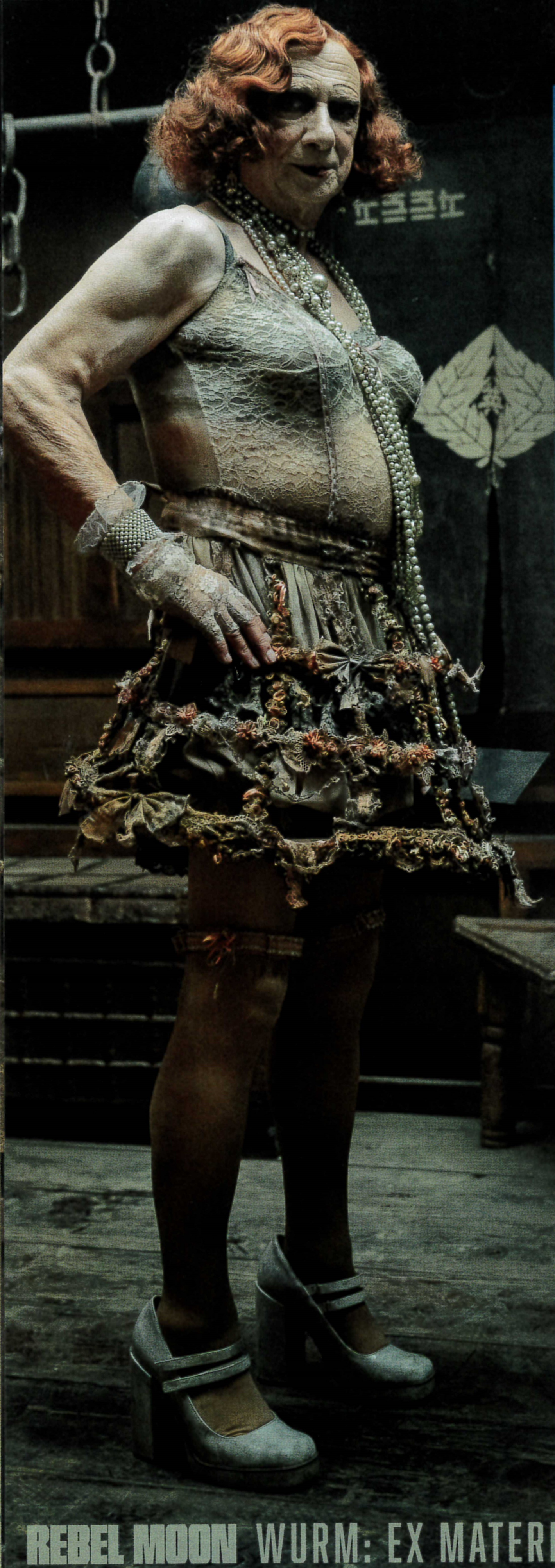


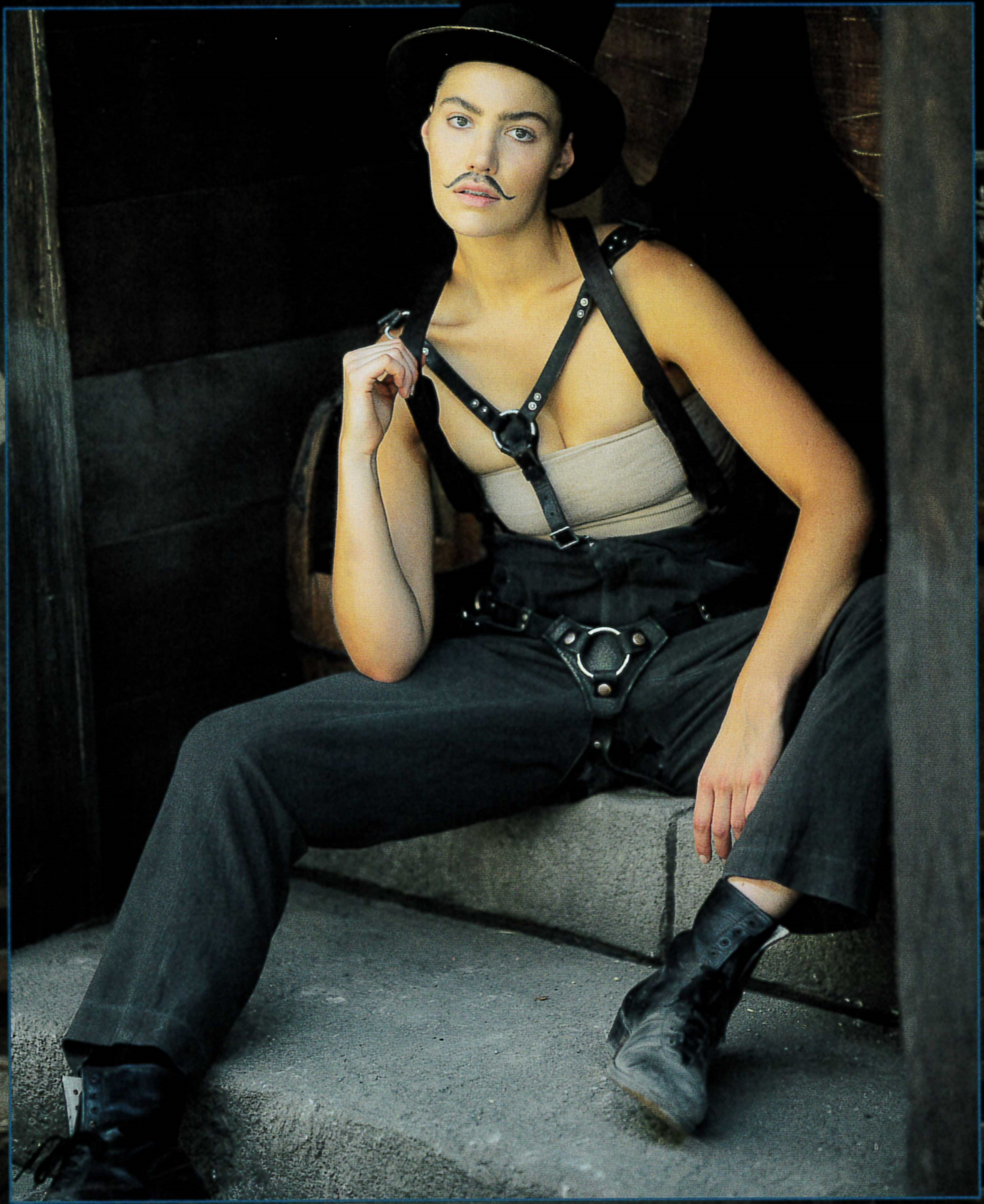
▲▶ Lori Jean Wilson.

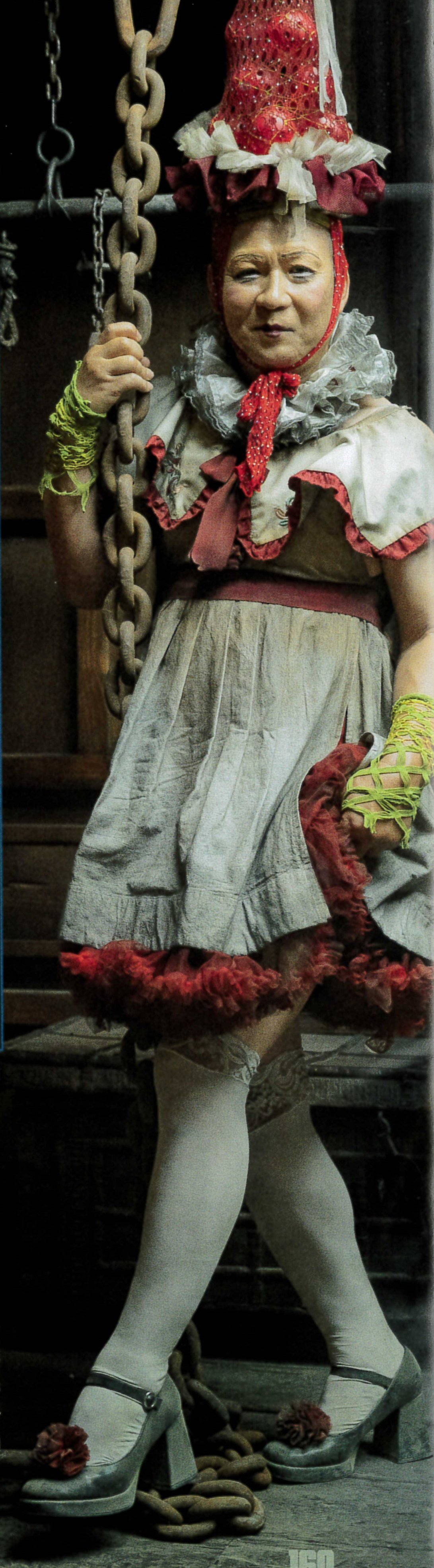
down her body. She has silicone appliances that have this mechanical-esque vibe to them, this armored feel, almost like she's a sexy version of the Motherworld soldier. It's almost fashion design, in a way. We really tried to create something that was very elegant and beautiful. A very unique character." Another courtesan with a striking look was a lavender young woman with prominent horns in a latex bodysuit. "She was a collaboration between Justin and me," Portnoy Porter says. "It was totally custom-made latex, and we wanted to not only accentuate where the makeup appliances were, but also the sharp angles that were in them. The big, sweeping horns, we covered them with the same latex that was on her body. Being covered in latex head to toe is no fun under the best of circumstances, and it was like a million degrees out, but she was a total champ the whole way through." These two ladies—or more likely others of their species—can also be spotted near the coliseum on Pollux.

Raleigh recalls yet another exotic alien: "We also have the Xanadite. She's the very, very tall Amazonian-looking woman that's all blue and hairless. She's completely covered in prosthetics, as well. She also has very large leg pieces to create these white pattern design lines that VFX

▶ (left to right) Frank Takaki, Lori Jean Wilson, Amaka Kai'Ro, Yoli Lara, Benjamin Hermann, Joshua Longshore, David Katz.







◀▲▶ David Katz, Yoli Lara, Frank Takaki, Amaka Kai'Ro, Jordan Coleman, Cesalina Grace.

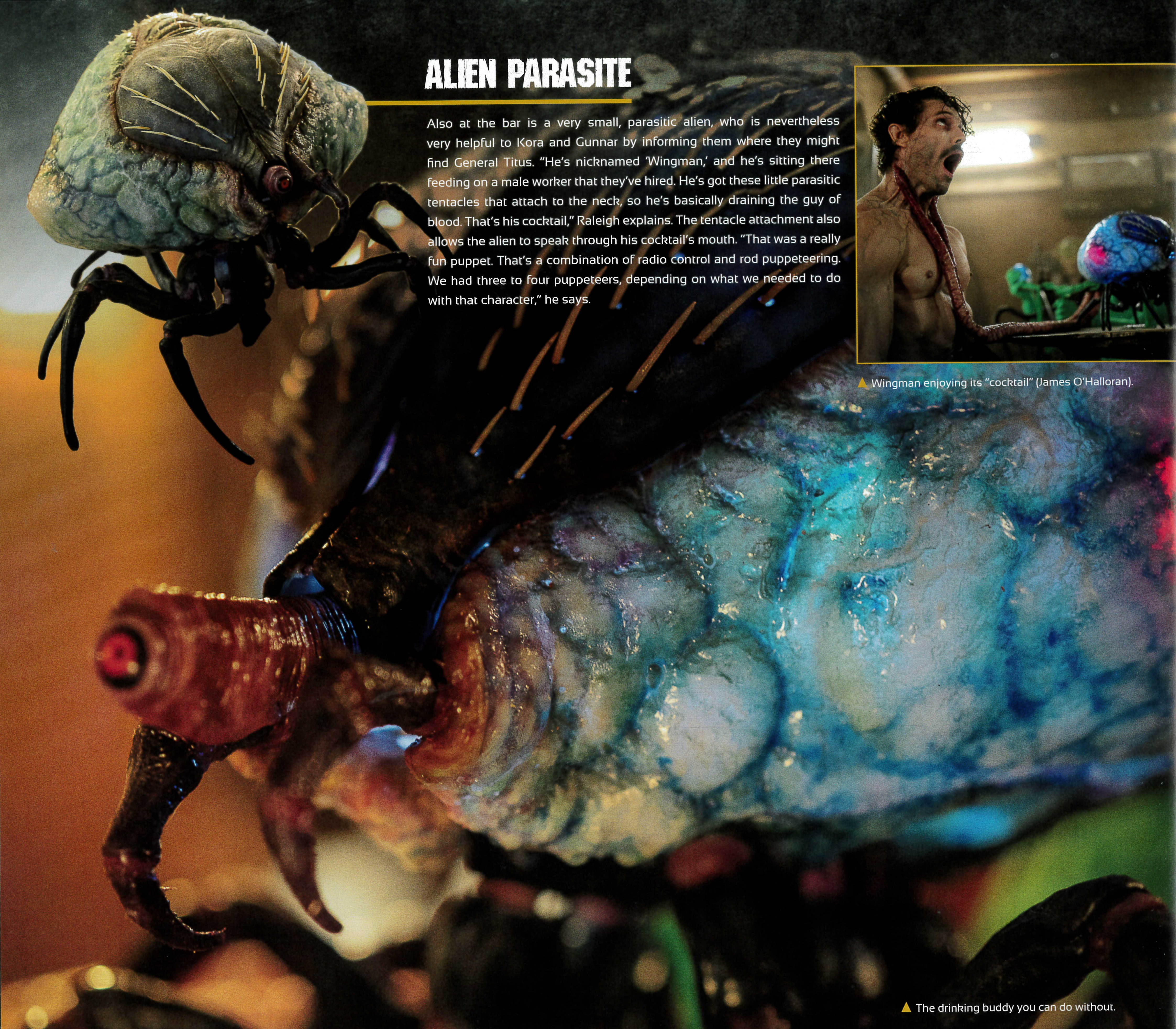
is going to go into and give a little bit of luminescence to. So, you'll have a little bit of glow intrinsically coming from her."

Two other employees of the brothel required no extensive makeup magic to turn heads. They needed only costumes and attitude. "One had this big, foppish hat with the feather in it, Elizabethan pumpkin pants. It was very much a traditionally masculine look—and then adding this beautiful corset kind of blurred the lines a little bit," she says. "Another was essentially a pony. We made him pony ears, and reins and a bit, and a waist cincher that was attached to a Rapunzel-length pony tail that we made out of downtown Los Angeles hair extensions. He's also a personal trainer, so his body is like insane; he was able to get the tail to swish just by flexing his abs. That was pretty cool."

ALIEN PARASITE

Also at the bar is a very small, parasitic alien, who is nevertheless very helpful to Kora and Gunnar by informing them where they might find General Titus. "He's nicknamed 'Wingman,' and he's sitting there feeding on a male worker that they've hired. He's got these little parasitic tentacles that attach to the neck, so he's basically draining the guy of blood. That's his cocktail," Raleigh explains. The tentacle attachment also allows the alien to speak through his cocktail's mouth. "That was a really fun puppet. That's a combination of radio control and rod puppeteering. We had three to four puppeteers, depending on what we needed to do with that character," he says.

▲ Wingman enjoying its "cocktail" (James O'Halloran).



▲ The drinking buddy you can do without.

DENIZENS

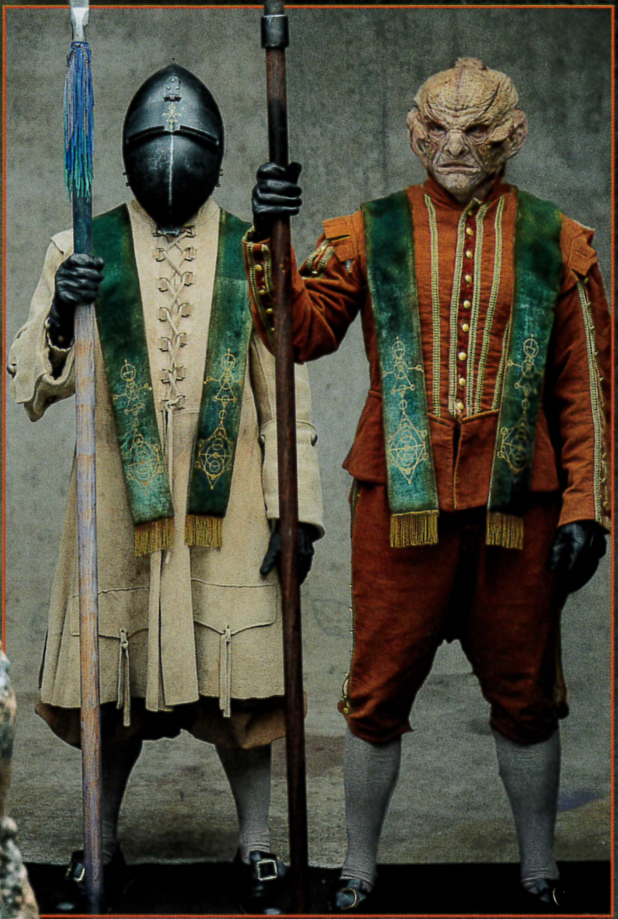
XIMON

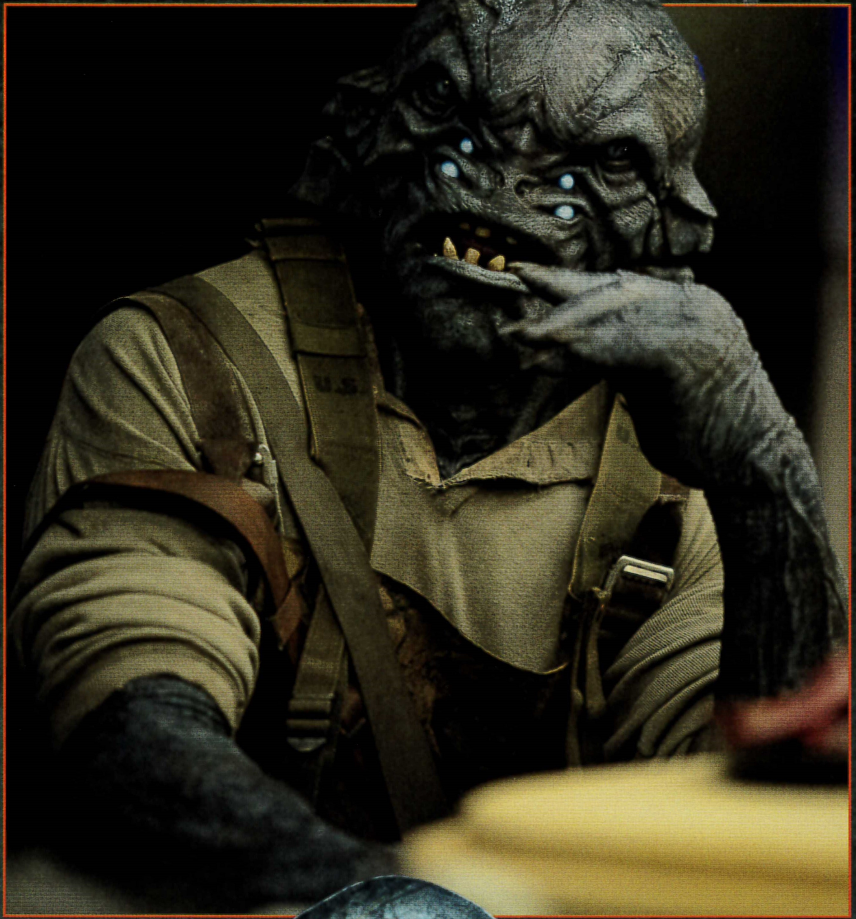
WHEN VELDT NEEDS HEROES, the good news is that Gunnar has a contact in Providence who is in league with the Bloodaxe Insurrectionists; the bad news is that contact, Ximon, has just been picked up by the Hawkshaws and is headed for interrogation by Admiral Noble. Christopher Matthew Cook (*Dog Eat Dog*, *Renfield*) plays the hapless agent who ends up in the Hawkshaw's diabolical exoskeletal restraints.

Designed and built by prop master Brad Elliott with help from Weta Workshop, making one of these restraints travel down the street in Providence in real time, however, was a puzzle the special effects department solved with a modified motorized scooter (and some post-production magic from VFX). "We made carriages that sat on top. It can run on dirt and mud and then on stage also," special effects supervisor Michael Gaspar explains. "We put a track down part of that street. We had a guide, so we could run it without trying to steer it. It's sort of like Autopia at Disneyland, but it was tight so it couldn't wobble around."

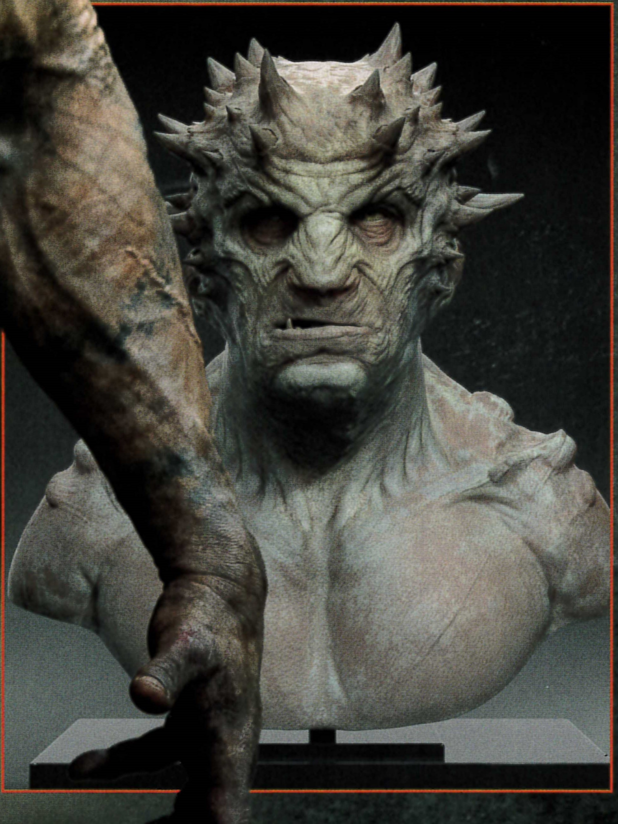
Ximon also gets an up-close demonstration of the spine-severing bolt gun (aka "the vertebreaker").

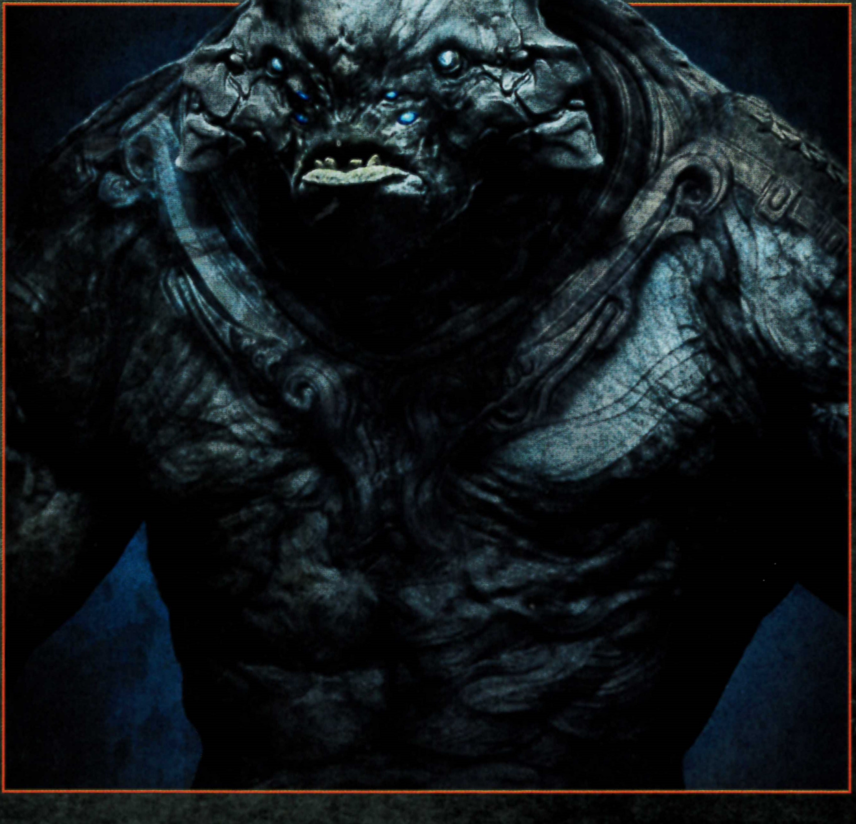
▲▶ Ximon (Christopher Matthew Cook) in the Hawkshaws' custody.

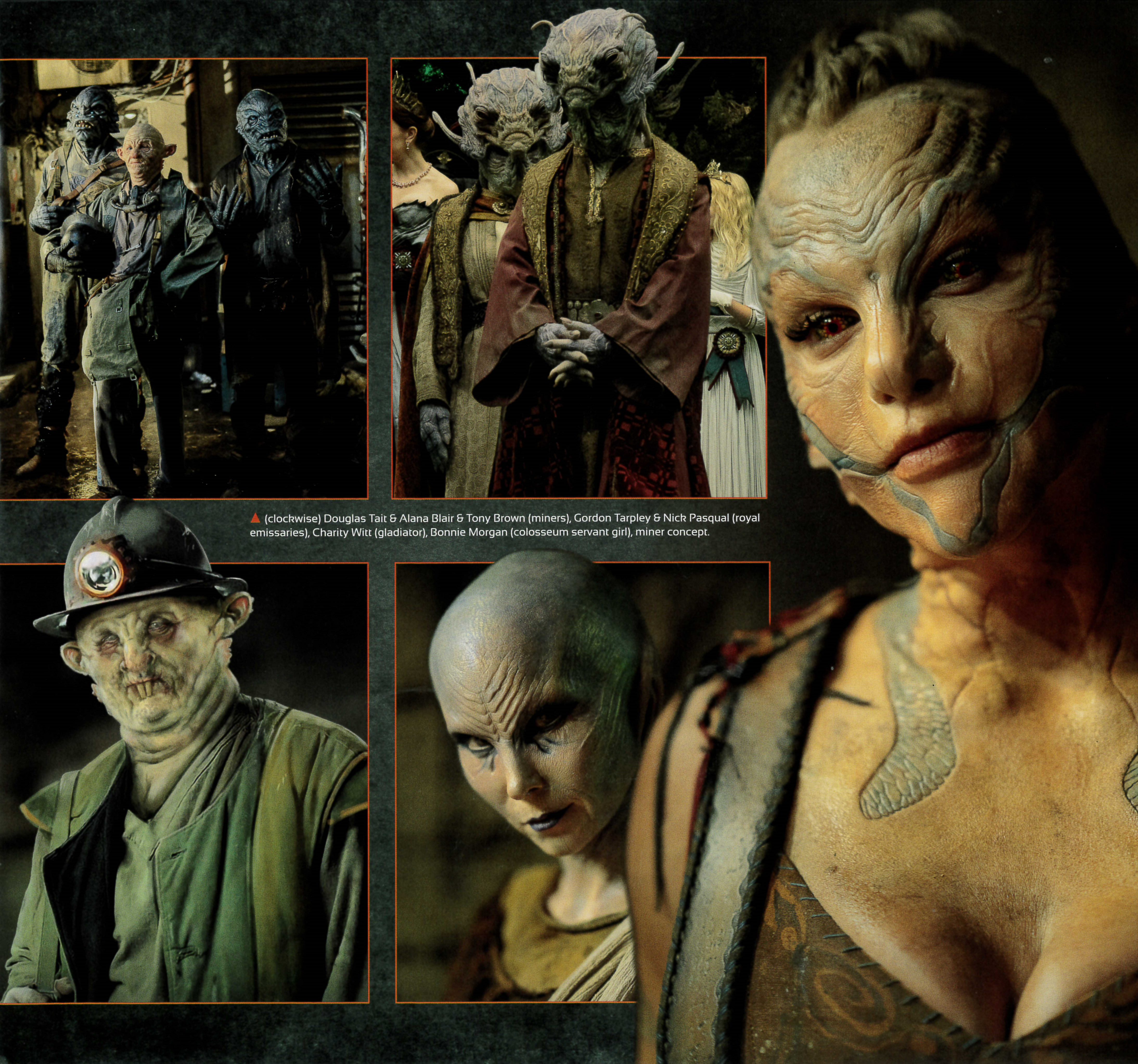




(clockwise) Sam Bass, Chuck Lines & Nick Pasqual (Sharaan guards), Douglas Tait, Daggus miner concept, Pollux gladiator sculpt.





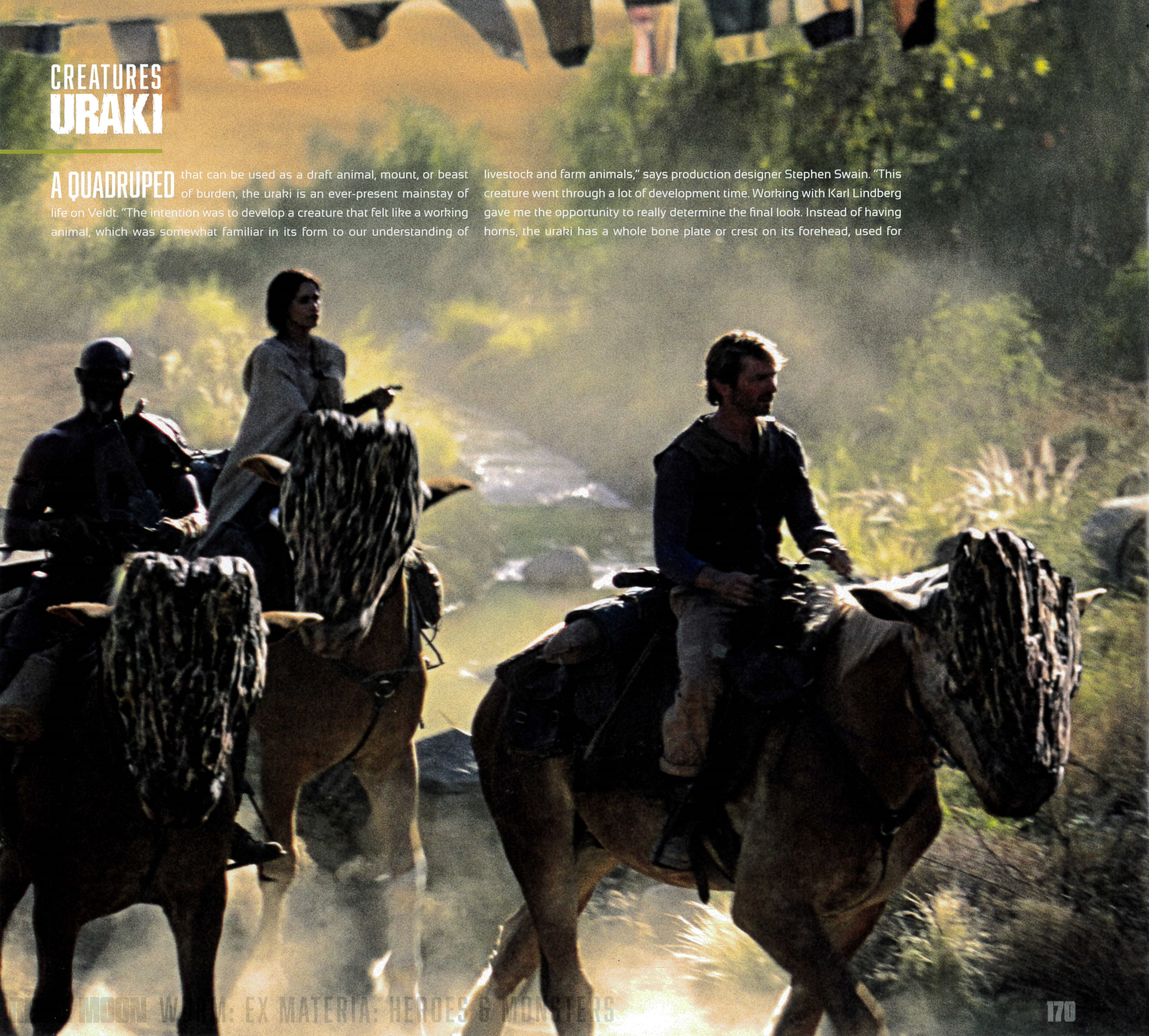


▲ (clockwise) Douglas Tait & Alana Blair & Tony Brown (miners), Gordon Tarpley & Nick Pasqual (royal emissaries), Charity Witt (gladiator), Bonnie Morgan (colosseum servant girl), miner concept.

(clockwise) Doc Adewole, Arthur Fuller, Akiko Cruz, Francis Ngannou, Eli Roberts & Holly Jones.

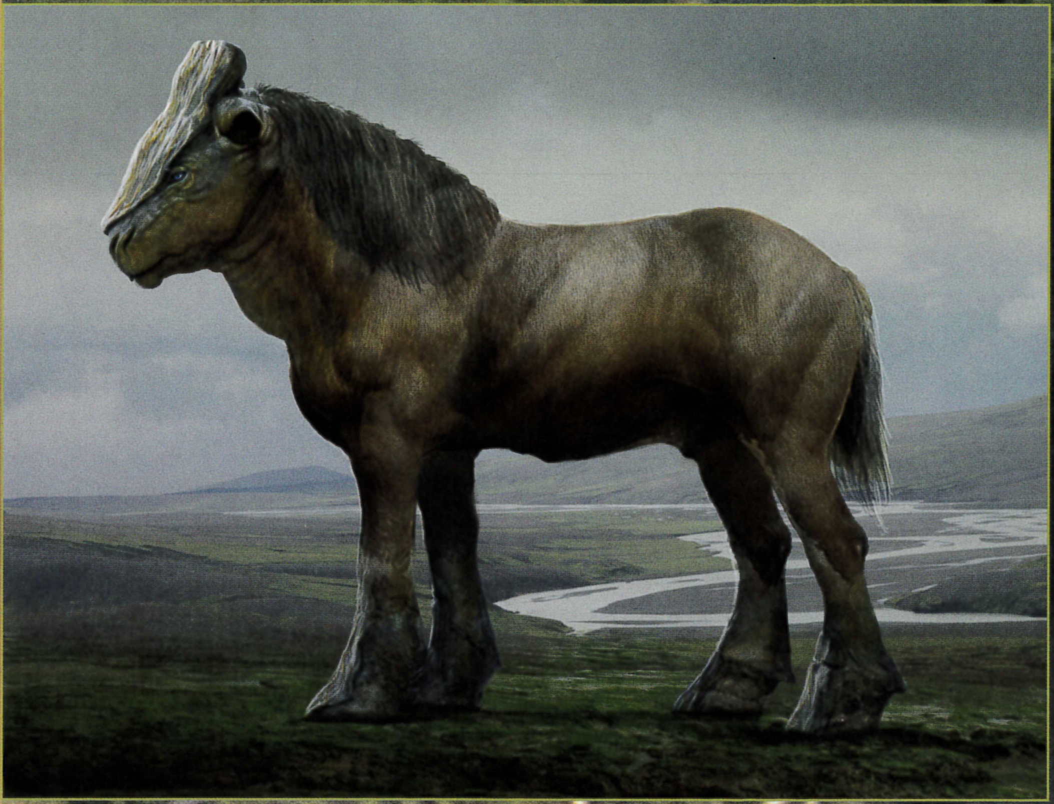
(clockwise) Jim Tavare, Jordan Coleman, Acacia Zoo & Eliana Grimes.

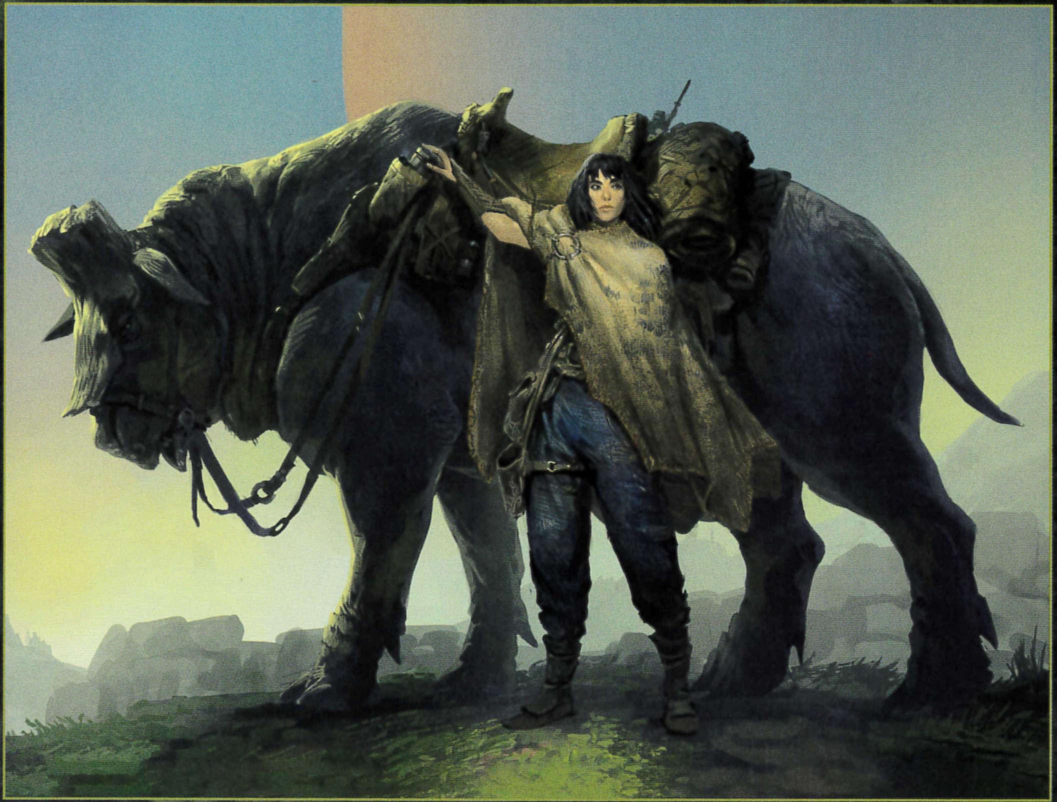
CREATURES



URAKI

A QUADRUPED that can be used as a draft animal, mount, or beast of burden, the uraki is an ever-present mainstay of life on Veldt. "The intention was to develop a creature that felt like a working animal, which was somewhat familiar in its form to our understanding of livestock and farm animals," says production designer Stephen Swain. "This creature went through a lot of development time. Working with Karl Lindberg gave me the opportunity to really determine the final look. Instead of having horns, the uraki has a whole bone plate or crest on its forehead, used for





breaking earth. Similarly, this motif is present on its shins and hooves. We also considered the coat of the creature and how this might alter with seasonal variations, whether this was with color, pattern, or volume of hair. It became interesting to see how this creature could be represented in the Veldtian landscape. During filming, large draft horses were used on set to match the bulk and mass of the uraki, with digital augmentation to adapt the final look."

Erik Martonovich is the owner of the horses that stood in for the urakis. "*Rebel Moon* wanted big horses in there. They initially said Clydesdales, because that's what everyone knows is a big horse. But the problem is that very few draft horses are used for riding and know anything about that," he explains. "We are probably the only people in the country with horses of this size that do riding. We brought in seven horses from Las Vegas. The lighter, blond-colored ones are Belgian [Draught]. They're the biggest breed of horse in the world. Then the one black horse is a Percheron. They're really similar. Not quite as big."

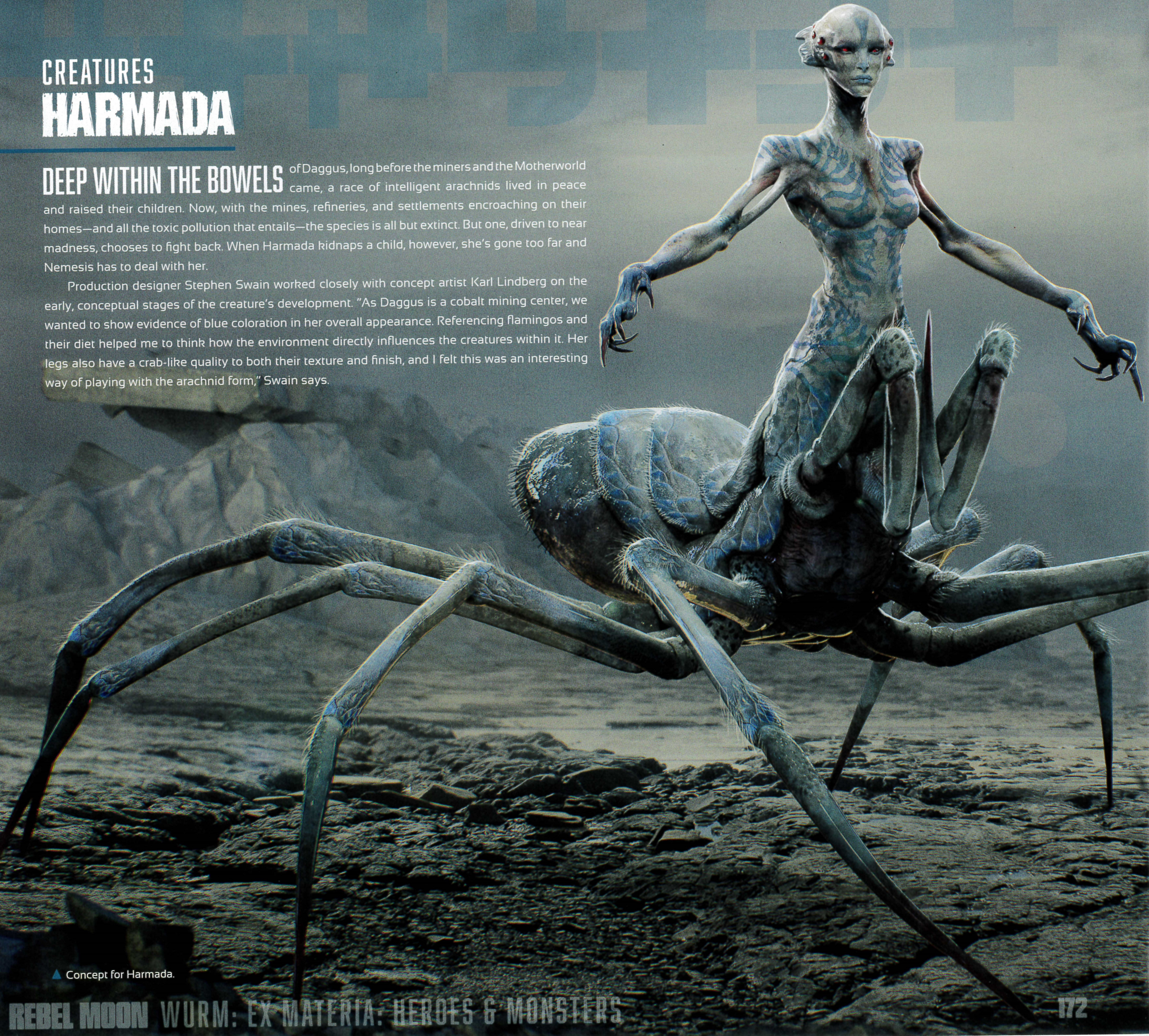
▲ A couple of early concepts for the urakis of Veldt.

CREATURES

HARMADA

DEEP WITHIN THE BOWELS of Daggus, long before the miners and the Motherworld came, a race of intelligent arachnids lived in peace and raised their children. Now, with the mines, refineries, and settlements encroaching on their homes—and all the toxic pollution that entails—the species is all but extinct. But one, driven to near madness, chooses to fight back. When Harmada kidnaps a child, however, she's gone too far and Nemesis has to deal with her.

Production designer Stephen Swain worked closely with concept artist Karl Lindberg on the early, conceptual stages of the creature's development. "As Daggus is a cobalt mining center, we wanted to show evidence of blue coloration in her overall appearance. Referencing flamingos and their diet helped me to think how the environment directly influences the creatures within it. Her legs also have a crab-like quality to both their texture and finish, and I felt this was an interesting way of playing with the arachnid form," Swain says.



▲ Concept for Harmada.

Jena Malone relaxes between takes with Carolyne Chen (as the child Harmada kidnaps).

▲▶ Nemesis confronts Harmada.

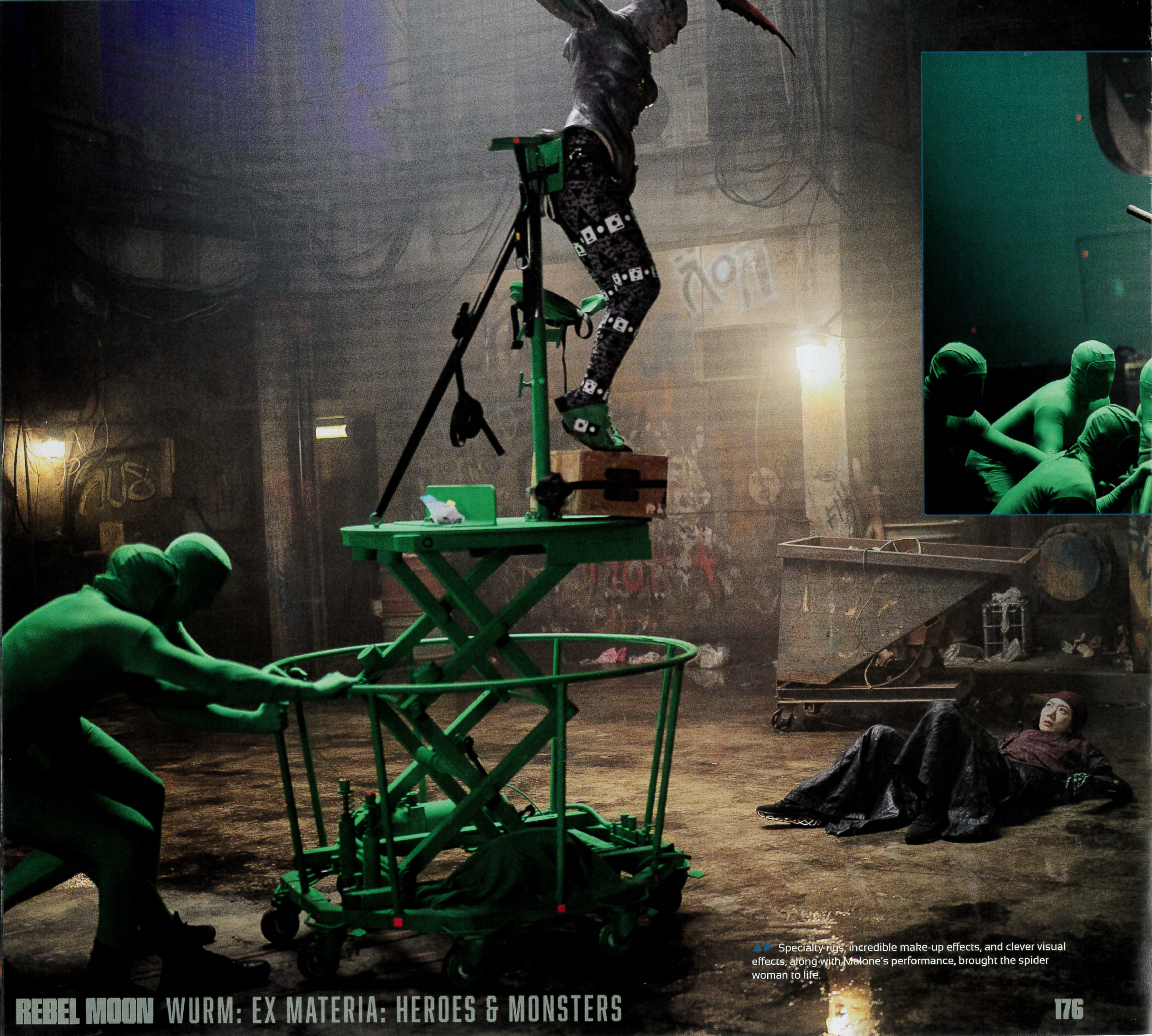
Makeup effects artist Justin Raleigh took that initial concept and adapted it, once the decision had been made to cast Jena Malone as Harmada. "Once we had a scan of Jena, we remodeled that design and altered it to fit her body. Originally, the design was very much elongated, very big proportions," says Raleigh. "So, we had to scale this whole thing down and find a good look that Zack and VFX were happy with. We built a waist-up creature suit, and then from the waist down it's all visual effects, and visual effects is bringing the two aspects together. It's a foam-rubber suit that's silicone treated, [with] full silicone cowl and silicone facial appliances, contact lenses and teeth for closers. All the additional eyes are digitally animated." He adds, "Plus, we did the cocoon child."

Another Snyder veteran, Malone (*Sucker Punch*, *The Neon Demon*) was up for the difficult task of embodying the enraged spider woman. "We've worked together so many times, that I'm an instant 'yes' if my time and schedule allow," she says. "But, you know, I've never done creature work before, so I was eager to try. I don't think anything like this has ever been done in the specifics of this type of prosthetic, carrying a child, a ten-foot spear, and stunt work up on a rig. It adds different levels of variation, and therefore challenge."

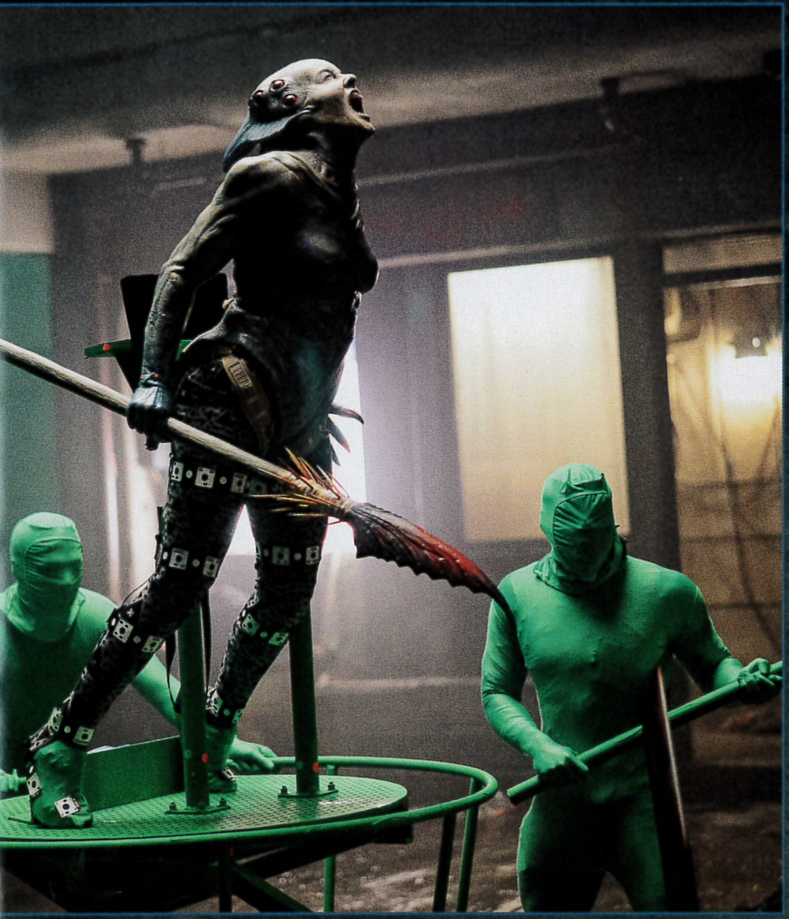
To execute that epic battle with Nemesis, for six days Malone was strapped into harnesses attached at various times to a hydraulic scissor lift and also a specialty parallelogram rig built by the special effects department—the same rig used to simulate Tarak's bucking ride on the bennu. "The stunt guys practice with this. They can push this whole thing around, you can just move it all over the set," says special effects supervisor Michael Gaspar. "As you're doing that, there's an operator who could move that scissor lift up and down at whatever speed they needed. They would tie that in with any shots with the parallelogram, to get the shot of her coming out of the ceiling and then down into the face of the person standing there."

Special effects also come up with an ingenious practical effect to intensify one sequence in the battle. "She had all these spider legs, and they wanted her to stab past somebody, miss, and hit this window. We came up with the idea that we would use breakaway glass, but I laminated it on one side with a clear laminate, so when we had a proxy-leg spear hit that thing, it smashed, but the glass all stayed intact. You could do it over and over again, on the same piece of glass."

The teams did what they could to mitigate Malone's daily stress of hours in the makeup chair and in the stunt harnesses, but it was still demanding



▲▶ Specialty rigs, incredible make-up effects, and clever visual effects, along with Malone's performance, brought the spider woman to life.



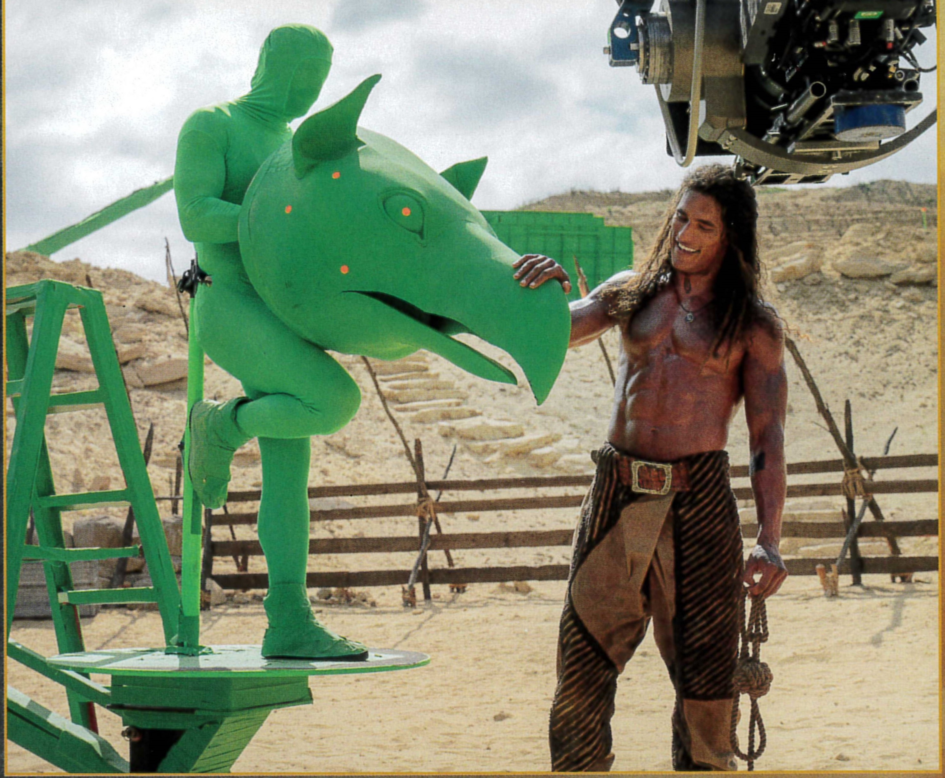
work. "She had to get in and out of the suit so much, and she had to change harnesses, so we couldn't glue her completely into it. There's a lot of areas where they're going to have to clean up seams," Raleigh explains. Malone recalls some of the difficulties she encountered: "Basically, I'm not allowed to move my hips at all, which, if anyone's ever done a fight scene, you realize that everything is in the hips for selling the movements. I think the hardest part, though, was the not hearing. The first couple of days there were tiny ear holes, so I felt like I was deeply underwater. The parallelogram is the hip apparatus that raises you, that enables you to go upside down, and I kept feeling nauseous [in it], because ears, obviously, are part of our equilibrium. But as you see things are looking okay, you just have to deeply trust the process."

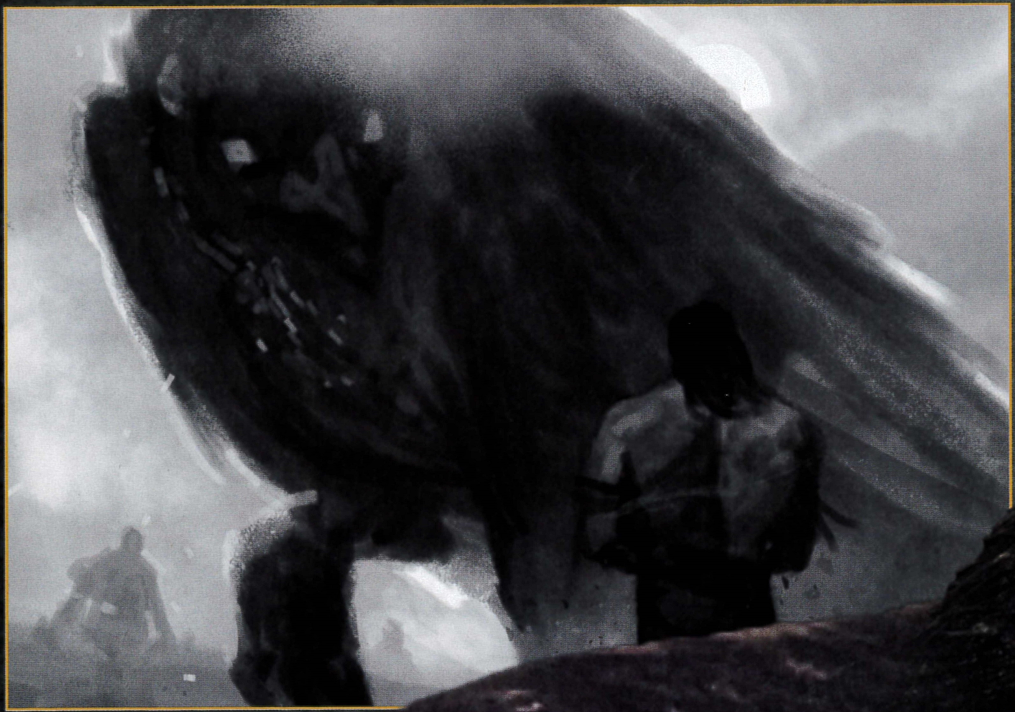
Also, the awe she felt for her opponent, Bae as Nemesis, made it worth all that grueling effort. "She's deeply intimidating," says Malone. "When she walks through those plastic things, entering into Harmada's area, and she's got that hat. It's like every single fantasy that I would've wanted as a young girl was coming true in front of my eyes. Just the care and level of detail, and the badassery that she harnesses. It's really breathtaking."

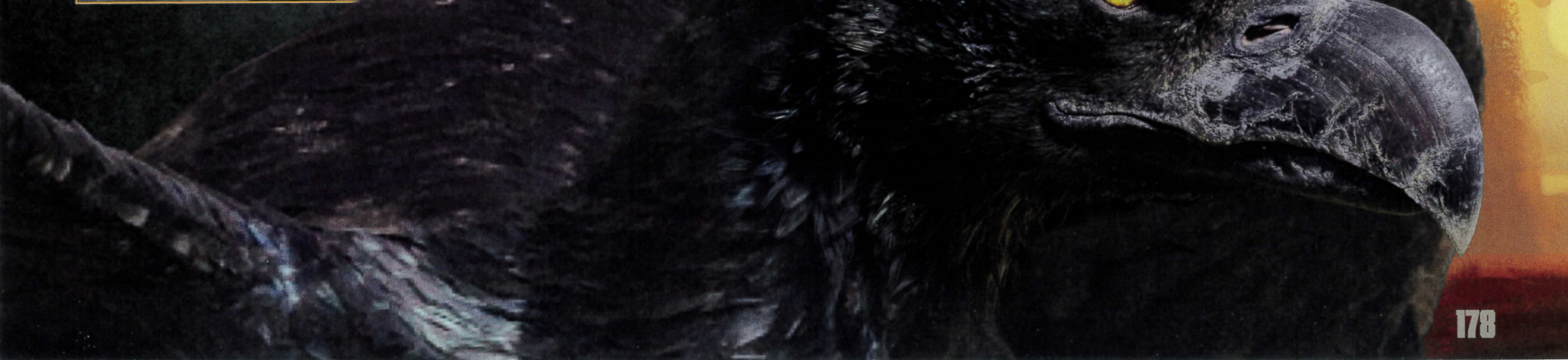
CREATURES
BENNU

UNBEKNOWNST TO HICKMAN, the connection between the bennu and Tarak—arising from their common origins on the planet Samandrai—allows the captive prince to ride the noble beast and thus gain his freedom. But it's still no easy task. "The bennu represents a wild stallion that has not been tamed. Hickman wants to control the creature like he controls everyone else," production designer Stephen Swain explains. "Zack had the notion that in Tarak's culture, they saw them as this sort of deity almost, and so between Tarak and the bennu there was this incredible respect. He was incredibly humble, and there was an interesting interplay between the characters."

The challenge came with designing a distinctive creature that at first glance seems so familiar. "Looking at the myriad ways the griffin has been represented in classical and fantasy art was both a help and a hindrance. I think one of the strongest features of the bennu is its







◀◀▼ Early concepts of the bennu imagined as a much larger beast.

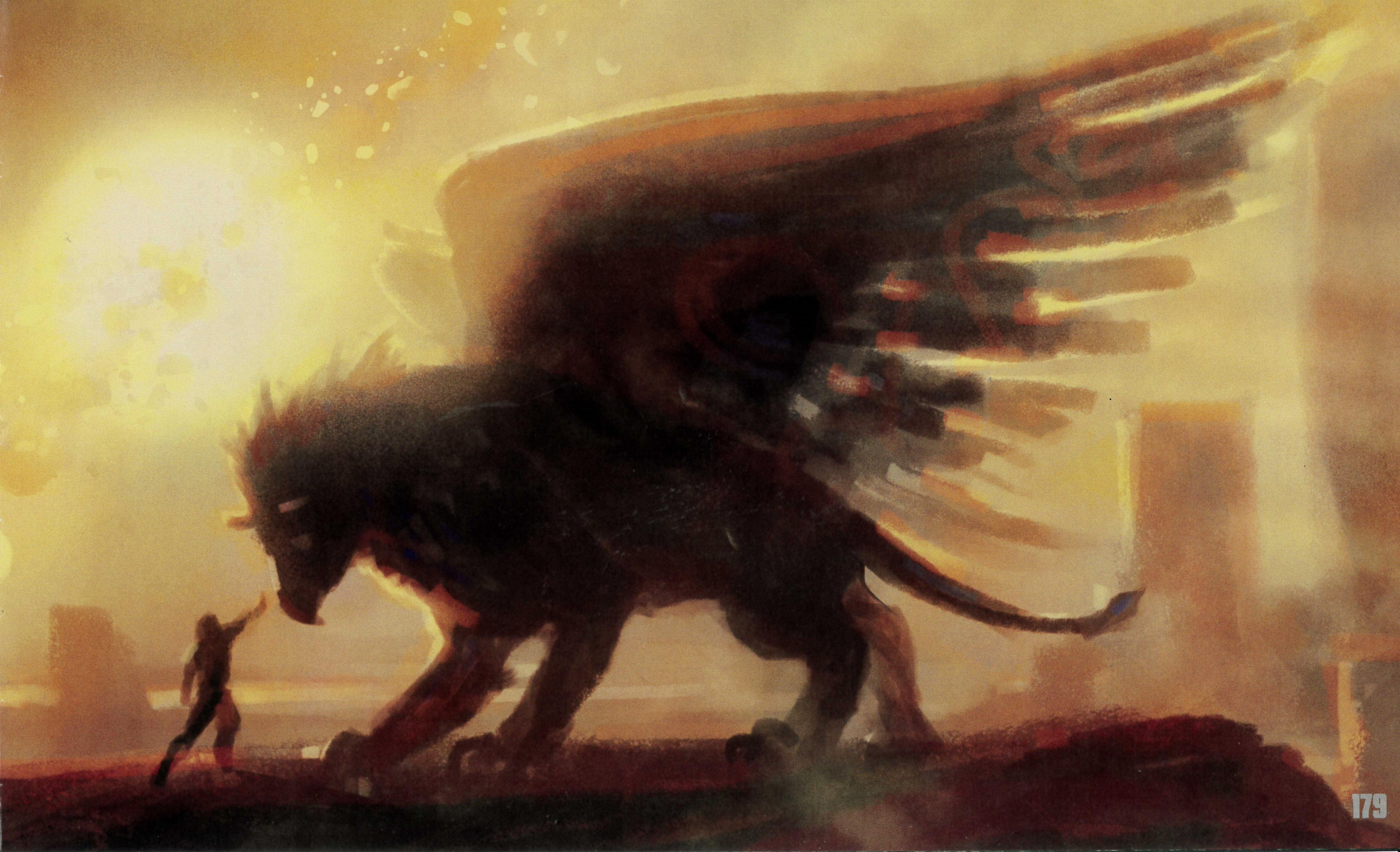
▼ The final bennu head in detail.

◀ Puppetry provides natural interaction for the actors, as well as a visual reference for the visual effects animators.

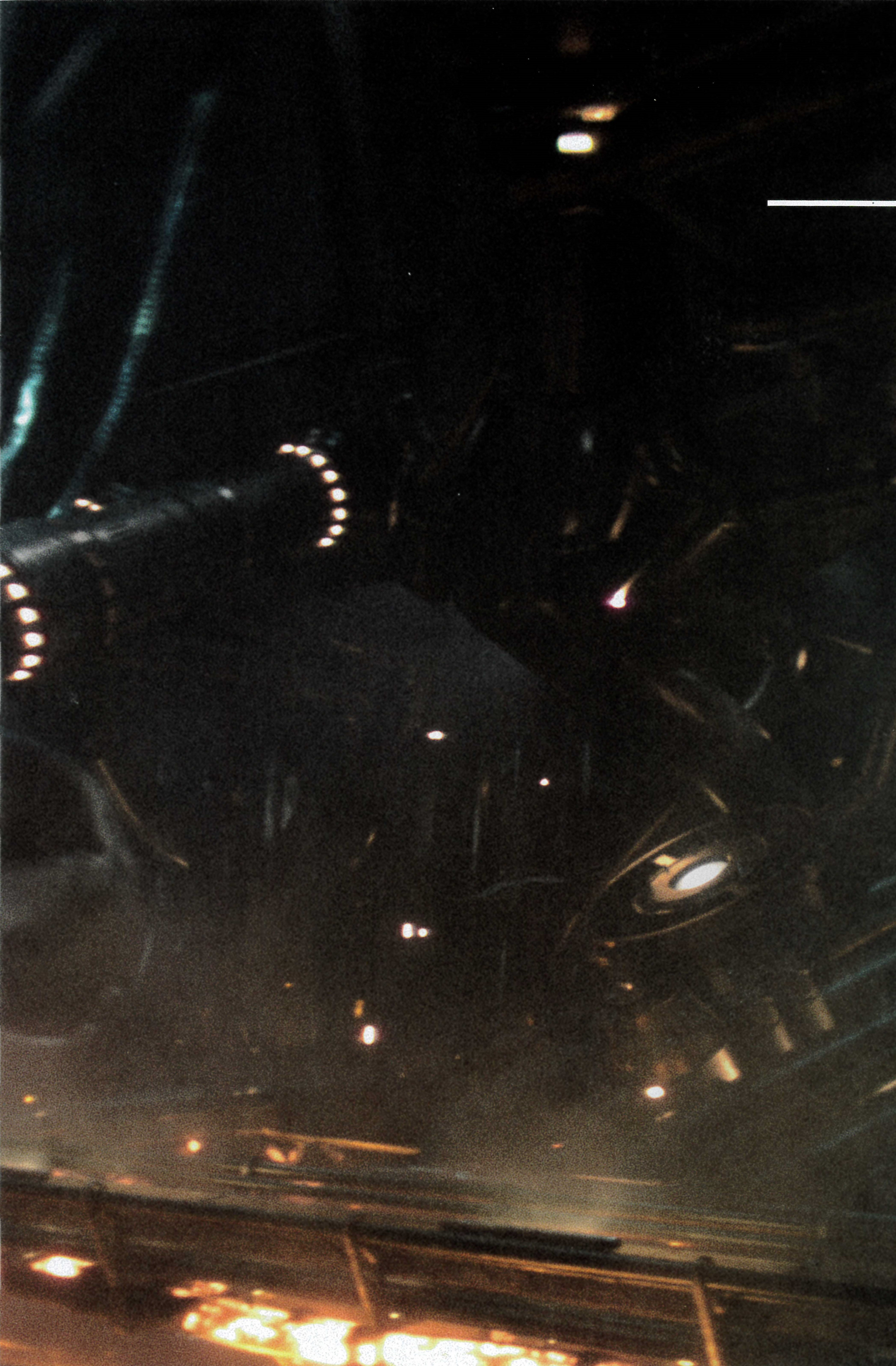
color. The dense, black feathers and fur have a beautiful, iridescent quality, which provides a wonderful depth in a strong light. Equally, the golden eyes are both mesmerizing and arresting," says Swain. Similarly, the brilliantly white bennu that accompanies Tarak's father's coffin in the royal funeral procession lends even more solemnity to the mournful scene.

Bringing Tarak's wild ride on the bennu to life involved mind-boggling amounts of visual effects (with some feathers supplied by the makeup effects department for reference), but *Rebel Moon*'s special effects wizards and stunt teams were also intimately involved to help Staz Nair's performance feel utterly real. "For Tarak, when he's trying to tame the bennu, we got this rig, it's called a parallelogram arm. It's like a camera crane. When you move it, and let's say if the camera was on it or an object was on it, it always stays level," special effects supervisor Michael Gaspar explains. "[Visual effects supervisor] Marcus [Taormina] had some scale models made so that we could figure out, in relation to a human being, how big is this thing? How wide? What's Tarak holding on to? So, we created a buck that was made out of fiberglass. It had a neck on it, and it was fashioned on top of a fifty-five-gallon drum. We padded it and put little pegs on it, so his feet would be in the right position for his legs, and when [visual effects] goes off and makes the 3D model, his body position is correct."

Filming the bennu scene surprised Nair in how it was both amazing and arduous. "I'm a bird nerd, because, honestly, do you know what I do in my time off? I sit in my garden and watch hummingbirds. So, getting to fly a massive bird was just epic," he says. "It was more physically straining than I expected, because the girth of the thing is bigger than any horse in existence. So, the inner thighs were in absolute agony, but it was really cool. Not relying on CGI, creating this bird, and giving me something physically to work with—it was far more natural than I expected it to feel." It's an experience that he wants to remember for a long time. "I've fostered pit bulls over the years, so I'm going to get a beautiful, black pit bull and call it 'Bennu.'"



▶ Tarak tames the bennu.



CREATURES

KALI

FOR HUNDREDS OF YEARS, the ships of the Motherworld were limited in how far and how fast they could spread the King's dominion by the speed of light. The discovery of the Kalis a thousand years ago changed all that. "They couldn't really rip through time and space [before]. Once the Kalis were brought through the dimensional rift and inserted into the engine rooms, then they really started to go nuts," Snyder says. "The Kalis are like goddesses of time and space from another dimension. They were seduced and captured by the Motherworld, and now act as engines—a sort of warp drive for the Motherworld. Many of the people who crew the ships, and even some of the people in high standing in the Motherworld, don't even know that there's an actual, conscious being inside that metal skin that's enslaved and used to jump time and space. They think it's just some sort of ornate reactor."

Bending the Kalis to their will is the job of specially trained Scribes of the order of the Priests. "Each Kali is controlled by our version of cobalt, which keeps her in stasis, in a sort of semi-lucid state that allows Scribes to interface with her and get her to do their bidding. The Scribes are the ones that predetermine jump points, and then they indoctrinate her with those concepts. Then she jumps. There's a minimum of a seventy-two-hour refresh, before you can jump again. It could be longer, depending on the Kali herself," Snyder explains.

One impetus for the Motherworld to continually expand and subjugate new planets is that keeping the Kalis alive and jumping consumes enormous amounts of resources. "They take organic matter from conquered worlds, whether that be plants and animals and trees, whether it's the conquered enemy themselves—that's probably not recorded, but it might be happening—they chop it up and that organic matter is vaporized in those furnaces and fed to the Kalis," Snyder continues, which explains the crewmen shoveling what looks like coal in the engine room of the dreadnought.

The Kalis themselves are both beautiful and terrible to behold. "Each is fifty feet tall, and looks like a valkyrie, like a warrior. She's like a monster, but also a goddess," Snyder says. "In her dimension, you would say that she has galaxies and stars beneath her skin. She's a destroyer of worlds."

Strangely enough, the relationship between the Motherworld and the Kalis might go back even further than anyone suspects. "On the Motherworld, there's mythological evidence that there was maybe an inter-dimensional war between giants," Snyder relates. "There's evidence around the grounds of the Summer Castle, the ancestral home of the royal family, where the petrified skeletons of giants have been since time immemorial, which are at the same scale as the Kalis."

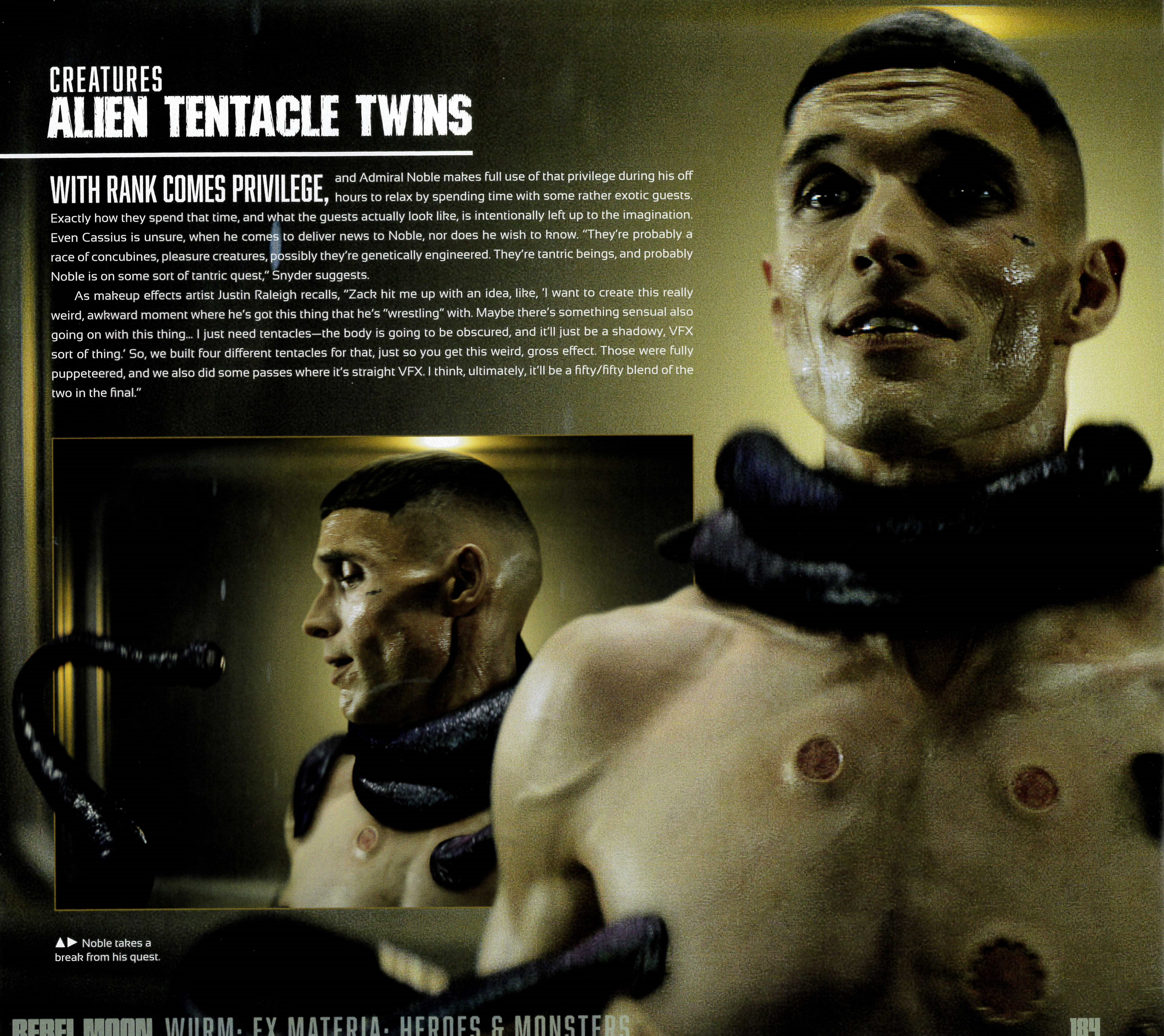
◀ Kora frees the Kali from its servitude.

CREATURES

ALIEN TENTACLE TWINS

WITH RANK COMES PRIVILEGE, and Admiral Noble makes full use of that privilege during his off hours to relax by spending time with some rather exotic guests. Exactly how they spend that time, and what the guests actually look like, is intentionally left up to the imagination. Even Cassius is unsure, when he comes to deliver news to Noble, nor does he wish to know. "They're probably a race of concubines, pleasure creatures, possibly they're genetically engineered. They're tantric beings, and probably Noble is on some sort of tantric quest," Snyder suggests.

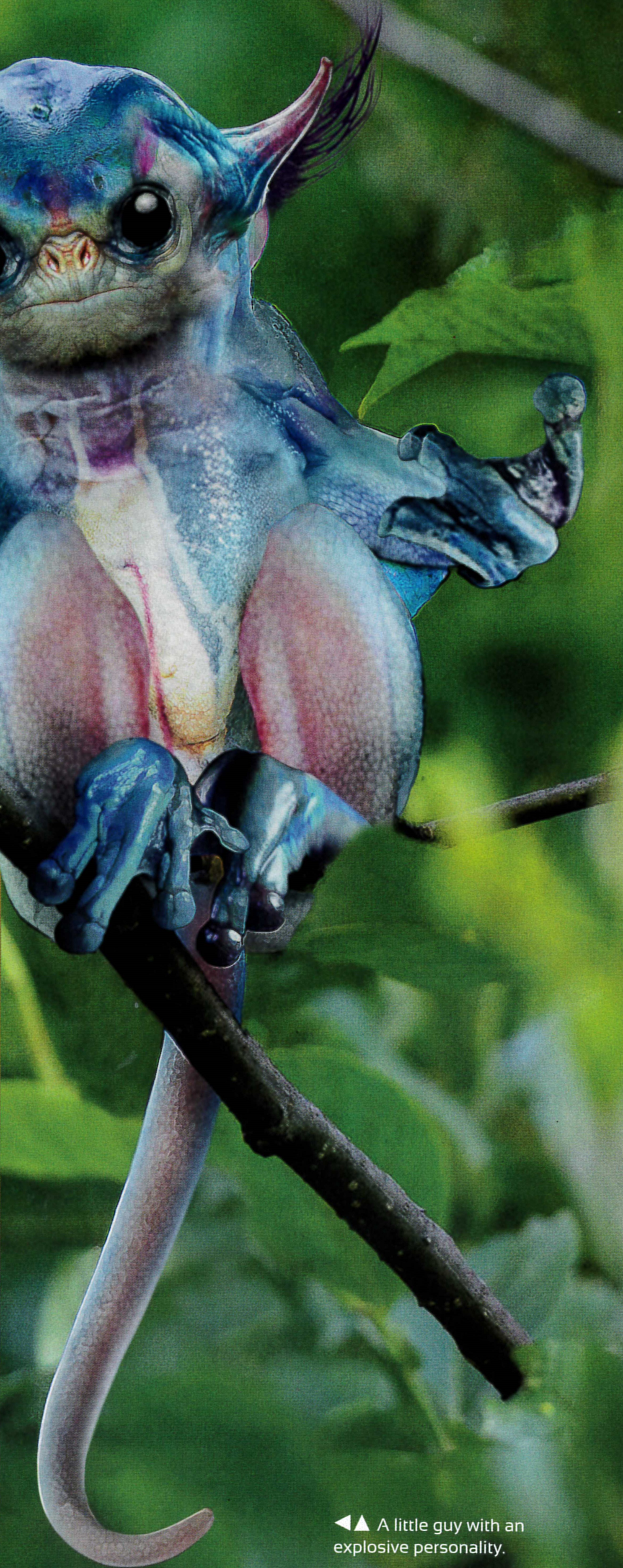
As makeup effects artist Justin Raleigh recalls, "Zack hit me up with an idea, like, 'I want to create this really weird, awkward moment where he's got this thing that he's "wrestling" with. Maybe there's something sensual also going on with this thing... I just need tentacles—the body is going to be obscured, and it'll just be a shadowy, VFX sort of thing.' So, we built four different tentacles for that, just so you get this weird, gross effect. Those were fully puppeteered, and we also did some passes where it's straight VFX. I think, ultimately, it'll be a fifty/fifty blend of the two in the final."



▲▶ Noble takes a break from his quest.

CREATURES

TOAN PRIMATE



◀▲ A little guy with an explosive personality.

THEMES

THE BATTLE OF VELDT

OUR HEROES have only just begun to learn to live again in a little place called Veldt when the day comes for them to defend their new home. The incredible effort the filmmakers undertook to make that final battle poignant, gripping, and visceral was nothing short of epic. "It's huge. It's a month long. A month on one battle sequence is almost unheard of, and it's going to be amazing. I can't wait for you to see what we have to deliver," says first assistant director and co-producer Misha Bukowski. "We have explosions, hand-to-hand combat, we have people going in the water, we have spaceships, we have farming implements. Our merry band of villagers here are really holding off the Motherworld with everything they've got."

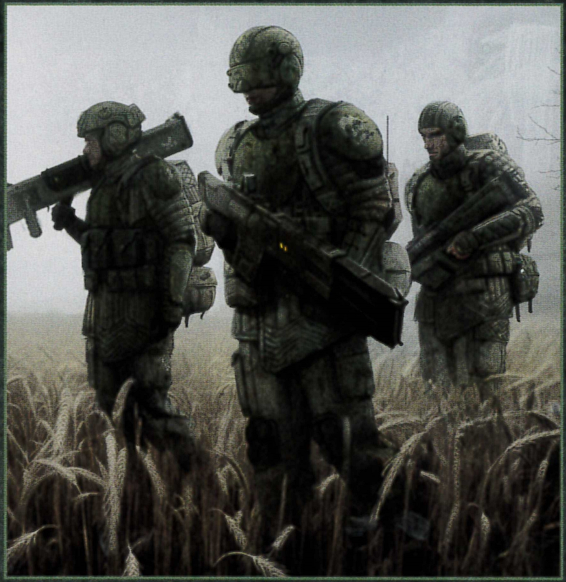
As one can imagine, filming this massive assault and spirited defense demanded tons of groundwork and double-checking safety protocols, but also faith in the talented crew to carry it out successfully. Producer Wesley Coller says, "It involved all those things that as a producer are so exciting to plan and so amazing to envision what they'll look like on film, but on the day require a lot of preparation, planning, and safety meetings. Those are the days that bring me great joy and anxiety at the same time." Producer Deborah Snyder adds that it's especially true for filming explosions: "You have to get it right. If you don't get the shot, it's pretty expensive, and you'd have to rebuild the house, which you don't really have time for." Unlike our damaged heroes, with pyrotechnics there are no second chances.

"We wanted our explosions to be big. We're telling a story where the most unimaginably threatening force is coming to this quaint village and showing zero mercy, and we needed explosions and a battle that showed that," Coller explains. "So, when we blow up the house, there wasn't just fire coming out of the windows or blowing a door off, there's nothing left of the house. There's a crater. There's slivers of it all over this set. When we were blowing up the field, it wasn't one or two explosions, it was half a dozen at a time, large explosions. It was making sure we were telling the story of this battle—at the scale that this battle takes place in the movie—and doing so as much practically as possible."

◀▶ Practical explosions redesign the set during the Battle of Veldt.

Another huge part of planning the battle was choreographing the stunts, figuring out how to string them together, and deciding how to shoot them to best effect. "Zack will say, 'Hey, I want a sequence like this. I want this to happen here. Maybe this will be cool.' We go back to our rehearsal space and we mock up an environment," stunt coordinator Freddy Bouciegues says, explaining the technique of previs, or "stuntvis," that is standard practice on a Snyder film. "We took a bunch of boxes, we went to a hardware store and we purchased lights, and we mocked it up as best we could. Then we choreographed an entire sequence and we filmed it. We try to get as close as possible. We edit it all together. Sometimes we add special effects to help enhance the story. Sometimes we add sound effects or music. Zack will most likely have some type of notes or adjustments. That whole process can happen multiple times. That goes out to all the departments, so everybody can track what is happening. We have something that they can rehearse to and is eventually used as a template, a guideline on the day when we film. I think it's a super-efficient way to make a day."

The actors have nothing but appreciation for all that intense prep and rehearsal. "Freddy's amazing, and so is my stunt double. Even though I do a lot, Mel [Jin] was incredible, because I could not have done that if she was not here to correct me or to come and tell me to line up the shot," says Sofia Boutella. "Freddy and all his guys—and at the beginning of the project, Damon [Caro]—they gave me the opportunity to be in shape in order to execute all these moves, over and over again. I was literally shooting guns all day. You come home, you can barely sleep, and you show up in the morning again to shoot guns again at six a.m. At first, I was like, 'I wish that all these stunt sequences were more spread out,' but in the end, I



◀ Snyder and crew in the midst of the fray with Ed Skrein.

▲ (clockwise from left) Jimmy joins the battle; Den reloads; Milius kicks ass; concept of imperial troops on the march.

think it's good that they were all together, because the intensity stays there. You really have to bring your head in that headspace, and your body in that headspace, and it's better to stay in it."

For Michiel Huisman, not unlike his character, Gunnar, going through this whole experience led him to do things he never would have imagined. "When the final battle starts, there's a big explosion, and Kora and Gunnar are thrown into the little river that flows through Veldt," he explains. "Of course, our doubles did that: run to the river, jump on a trampoline, fall into the river. It looked epic. I already knew Sofia was going to say, 'We can do that, too,' and I was like, 'Uh, maybe we can just come out of the water. Maybe that's fine, too.' Then Zack, after doing it once or twice with doubles, said to us, 'Looks pretty easy, no?' I was like, 'Oh, here we go.' So, in the sequence, we jump into the river, we're a bit dazed, we come out, and we run up to the horses, and jump on. These are massive horses; more like a camel-horse! I'm coming out of the river, and I'm entirely soaked, and these Motherworld army pants that I've put on as part of my disguise are very tight, and now they're very heavy—and I cannot get my left leg high enough to get on this horse. Meanwhile, Sofia is giving me her lines and I'm supposed to answer that, and I'm thinking, 'What am I going to do? This was such a great sequence. We're not going to mess this up.' But I jumped on, and it worked, so that felt great."

At the center of all that carnage, all those acts of heroism and villainy, and all that controlled chaos, is Snyder. Literally. "Zack just loves being in the trenches," says his wife. "I can't imagine him ever going back to just directing, and not being the cinematographer as well. It's in his blood. He likes the camera, he likes holding it. The explosions are going off, and he's right there in it. I think, also, there's an intimacy with the actors. He can give direction differently than if you're sitting at a monitor. At this point in his career, I can't see him going back."

THEMES

FAMILY

THROUGHOUT THIS BOOK, we have shared examples of how the personal histories of the actors lent themselves to the world building in *Rebel Moon*. There are sounds of Arabic and French in the language of Sharaan that Kora speaks to King Levitica. Tarak's native Samandrait contains words from Russian and Portuguese. Aris wears a bracelet that honors Sky Yang's ancestral home in China. There are also many, many other instances that we haven't mentioned, and sharp-eyed viewers will have to discover those on their own. This approach was not just a clever way to embrace a wildly diverse, international cast and have their portrayals feel that much more distinctive and authentic. It also subtly signals that a major thread winding through these films is, in fact, family.

Now, it's undeniable that one facet of that is the destruction of families—most often literally—with causes running the gamut from military incursion to political assassination. But these are backstories. Over the course of these two films, we see our heroes forging new bonds to replace what was lost. A universal theme, especially in this day and age. "It's a great time for this film, because it's about finding your community. It's about, at its heart, finding family," says producer Deborah Snyder. "I think a lot of us are really struggling and trying to figure that out for ourselves. So, when we see this village that in the end embraces our warriors that have been lost in the world, this group of disenfranchised characters, I think that's something that's going to really resonate."

For no one is that more true than for Kora, who was orphaned, made homeless, and then betrayed in the cruelest of ways by the man who fostered her. Through her journey and exploits with her new companions, she slowly comes to see Veldt as perhaps her last hope. "You meet her and she doesn't have a home and family, really," says Sofia Boutella, "and that's what Veldt is teaching her, how to build that. She doesn't believe that at the beginning of the film. She has nothing really tangible, palpable for her to grasp onto. But when she meets these people, all of a sudden this becomes her family. She finds her power, finally, because she finds a home to defend, and people who she loves and who love her back. She finds importance in giving these people a chance to have a life and home for themselves."

Bringing together folks for an intense, creative endeavor over months and months tends to build kinship, too. "It has been this amazing journey," says Deborah Snyder. "A lot of the crew we've worked with for over a decade. We tend to work with the same people over and over, because there's that level of trust. Then we bring in new people along the way. I feel like on this one we got a lot of new people that are going to now be part of our reoccurring family."

REBEL MOON FAMILY

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

WE WOULD LIKE TO EXTEND A SPECIAL THANKS to all the incredibly talented writers, actors, artists, designers, photographers, technicians, and countless other accomplished crew members, vendors, and partners who joined us on this epic journey. It is your combined talent, creativity, brilliance, and dedication that make it possible to create the expansive universe of an ambitious endeavor like REBEL MOON.

It was an amazing adventure making this film and we are incredibly thankful to have been able to go on this tremendous journey with each and every one of you.

We would also like to say thank you to everyone at Netflix for their enthusiastic support throughout the process, making the realization of this film possible.

Sincerely,

Zack, Debbie, Wesley & Eric

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK the producers, department heads, cast, and crew who donated their invaluable time and quotes to making this book a reality by providing such special insight into the heroes and villains of this fascinating universe they have created.

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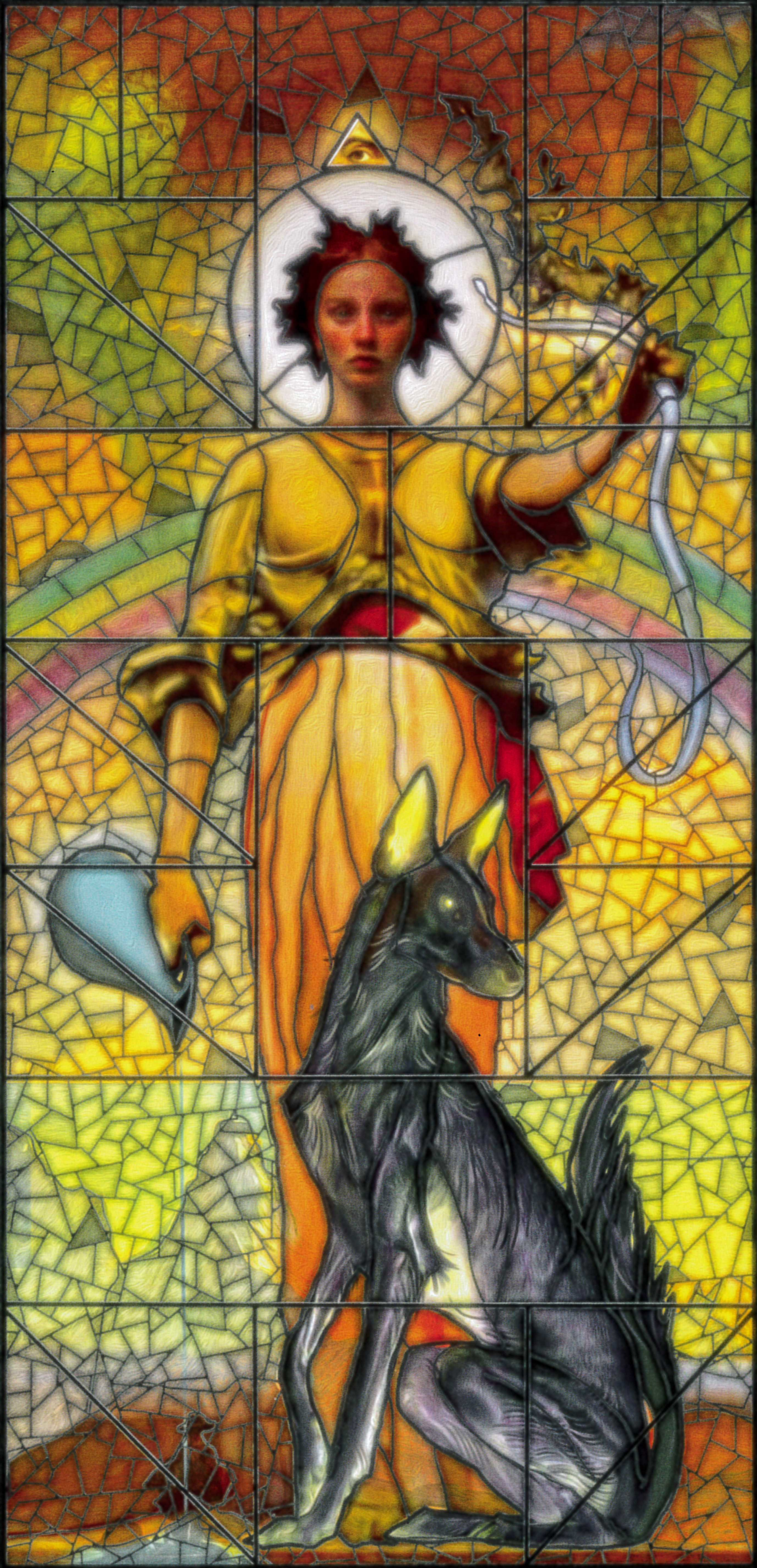
Peter Aperlo



▶ Concept for the stained glass window in the Motherworld Palace Throne Room.